

# Christian ministers unite against march

By ROBERT FEDER

*Correspondent*

SKOKIE – A dozen Christian clergymen, responding to the village's "deep distress" over the planned Nazi march, have scheduled an inter-faith open air worship service for Sunday, April 16.

The Christian Clergy of Skokie, members of the Niles Township Clergy forum, held a press conference Thursday, March 24, to announce the service, which will start at 3 p.m. at the Niles West high school stadium, Oakton and Edens, Skokie.

The religious leaders also detailed five other steps they will take in response to the march and issued a joint statement noting that they "appreciate the deep concern of people everywhere."

The controversial demonstration by members of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party of America had been planned for April 20, but a court order delayed the march in Skokie for at least 45 days.

REV. THOMAS O'Connor, pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ,

said the open air service is intended to "emphasize the solidarity of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish community here."

He explained, "It is an attempt to say to the country that Skokie is not just a place for confrontation. There is a great deal of brotherhood and love here. We are grateful to God we live here and we will give thanksgiving to our common God that we can all relate to one another and work together."

Ministers announcing their joint efforts Thursday were three Lutherans, three Presbyterians, two Methodists, a Baptist, an Episcopalian and one from the United Church of Christ, and one Catholic priest. Also present as observers were two rabbis and a cantor.

"Basically, this was to be seen as a Christian statement, not necessarily as a Jewish statement. This is not just a Jewish problem, but one that confronts all people in Skokie of all faiths. I think it's important that the Christian community makes this statement on its own," Rev. O'Connor said.

THE CLERGYMEN'S joint statement said:

"It is our feeling that we must respond as a people of God, concerned for the physical, mental, and spiritual need of all. We especially are committed to identifying with the Jewish residents in their deep distress occasioned by the Nazi presence and exercise of un-American and irreligious free speech.

"We are aware also that a Nazi presence would be distressing for a variety of reasons to thousands of non-Jewish residents as well.

"Therefore, we want to share visibly and invisibly in a manner that will honor God and all of His children. We will help to prepare the open air worship service in cooperation with local religious leaders of every faith. We will encourage people in and outside of Skokie to be in prayer in their own communities on a day when the Nazis might march. And we respectfully ask other communities not to complicate the already formidable problem of local authorities to deal with a multitude of people.

"In the meantime, we truly appreciate the deep concern of people everywhere who have expressed a resolve to be of the greatest help in encouraging us to meet a community challenge in a manner befitting people of God."

injuries or arrests.

- Publicizing a series of Christian-Jewish Bible studies April 2-23 on successive Sunday evenings. The first is set for 7:30 p.m. April 2 at St. Peter's United Church of Christ, Oakton and Laramie, Skokie. The story of Creation will be discussed.

- Cooperating and participating in "Remembrance Week" April 15-22, as proclaimed by Skokie officials, to recall the Holocaust and the events of World War II.

WHEN ASKED why the clergymen scheduled their open air service for April 16, even though the April 26 Nazi march had been postponed, Rev. O'Connor said, "The timing is all our own and these are areas we feel we can move in now. We will not be bound by the particular whims of one man (Nazi leader Frank Collin)."

Rev. O'Connor emphasized that the position of the Christian clergymen on the Nazi march is not a new one. "We issued similar statements as long ago as April and June of last year to spell out how we felt about the march. But one of the problems is, the press hasn't asked us where we stand on this," he said.