

CATHOLIC COURIER

DIocese of ROCHESTER, NY

Vol. 104 No. 7 Thursday, November 12, 1992 75¢ 20 pages



Hatred simmers in tough times

ROCHESTER — The scenes are chillingly familiar.

Men wearing swastika armbands raising their hands in stiff-armed salute. Street fighting. Immigrants being attacked — even killed — on an almost daily basis.

But these scenes are not from the 1920s and '30s when Hitler's Nazis gained control of Germany. These scenes are taking place today.

And they are not limited to Germany.

News reports have documented white supremacist and neo-Nazi violence taking place in France, South Africa, Italy, Brazil and even the United States.

Nor is the Diocese of Rochester exempt.

In June of 1991, a black family in Rochester found a cross burning on their lawn. On Oct. 17, Monroe County authorities discovered racist graffiti covering the outside walls of the Ontario Beach Park bathhouse.

And in September of this year, Auburn residents were shocked to learn that a Philadelphia-based neo-Nazi group, the United States of America Nationalist Party, was thinking of establishing a commune there (see related

story, page 18).

"It's really all over the world now," noted David Webb, a writer and researcher for the Montgomery, Ala., based Klanwatch, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that monitors hate groups in the United States.

In a telephone interview, Webb told the *Catholic Courier* that the number of hate groups in the United States — the Ku Klux Klan, skinheads, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity Church, Aryan Nations, etc. — increased 27 percent between 1990 and 1991, from 273 to 346.

The number of U.S. citizens involved in these groups had risen to around 25,000 Webb said, adding that exact membership figures are hard to obtain due to the groups' secrecy.

Also rising is the number of hate-related crimes targeting such groups as blacks, Jews, Asians and homosexuals.

In 1989, Klanwatch recorded seven murders, 34 cross burnings and 125 acts of vandalism linked to hate groups. The figures for 1991 were 25 murders, 101 cross burnings and 216 acts of vandalism.

"These people hate," Webb said. "That's

what they thrive on. Any time you have people hate for no reason, you're not far away from violence."

One of the roots of this hatred is economics, Webb said.

"Traditionally, we see this during bad economic times," he said. "White supremacist groups blame (blacks, Jews, gays and immigrants) for their problems."

Thus, he noted, Klan membership increased during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The recessionary pattern of the last few years has helped to foster the growth among many hate groups today, he noted.

But Tom Halpern of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith said the resurgence of hate groups should not be attributed to the economy alone.

"Some people are still not comfortable with the idea of the U.S. as a multi-ethnic society," noted Halpern, an associate director for the ADL's Fact Finding Department in New York City.

Thus criticisms of such targets as immigra-

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