

Priest murdered in church

Greek Orthodox community in mourning

By NANCY BARR
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Members of the Greek Orthodox Community of Santa Cruz County are today mourning the loss of their priest, who was found murdered in the church on Church Street early yesterday.

The Rev. John Karastamatis was found at 1:40 a.m. by his 17-year-old son, Foti, upon returning home. Father John, as he is known in the community, was lying in a hallway of the living quarters of the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church, where he lived with his wife and son.

The church is located at 223 Church St., Santa Cruz, and is surrounded by the civic center, city hall, the city library and

the offices of the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

Today the church was quiet, cordoned off with a yellow tape marking the police line and warning, "Do not cross."

The county coroner's office released a report this morning saying Father John died as a result of "blunt trauma to the head." the coroner also confirmed that Father John was murdered, and did not die as a result of an accident.

Santa Cruz Police were not giving out any details of the murder this morning, but scheduled a press conference for the afternoon.

Father John and his son had gone out to dinner together Saturday night and each went their separate ways afterwards,

according to reports. When Foti, a student at Santa Cruz High School, returned, he found his father dead.

Anastasia Karastamatis, Father John's wife, was out of town, visiting the couple's daughter and her newborn child. Mrs. Karastamatis and Foti are now staying with relatives in the San Francisco Bay area.

Father John, 47, was born and raised in Greece, and spent some time in the San Francisco area before coming to Santa Cruz five years ago. His parishioners say he was the driving force behind the local Greek Orthodox Community.

"We used to commute all the way to San Jose and Salinas for worship for many years," said

Tony Petroutsas of Watsonville, who is a past president of Father John's church. "Nobody tried to start a church until Father John came here and visited, and he loved it."

The county's Greek Orthodox Community now includes almost 80 families, Petroutsas said, including a number of Watsonville families.

Connie Mellis of Santa Cruz, another parishioner, said Father John was "the driving force behind this community." It was with his leadership that the community managed to buy the building on Church Street.

"We started out with church meetings in halls or other churches," Mellis said. "It was with his support and striving and determination that we all keep saying, 'look where we are now.' We feel very good about what we've accomplished."

Petroutsas and Mellis described Father John as lovable, kind, trusting, and a "dynamite person."

"He really was more than just a priest. He was a humanitarian," Mellis said. "He'd



Father John Karastamatis (with beard) posed with Greek Orthodox official Anthony Diavatis last Easter.

help anyone who came along."

Chancellor James Adams of the Greek Orthodox Diocese in San Francisco said he will meet with the Santa Cruz police chief today, before making any comments on Father John's death.

"The whole community is in a state of shock," Petroutsas said. "It's just unbelievable."