

Few leads, no suspects in murder of SC priest

By NANCY BARR
and GUY LASNIER
STAFF WRITERS

Police have few leads and no suspects in the murder of Greek Orthodox priest John Karastamatis last weekend.

Father John, as he was known to nearly everyone, was found in a hallway of the church living quarters in downtown Santa Cruz at 1:40 a.m. Sunday by his 17-year-old son, Foti.

The priest had been brutally beaten and stabbed after putting up a fierce struggle, authorities said. The person or persons who beat the 47-year-old priest "really wanted him dead," one official said. The murderer may have suffered cuts or other injuries in a struggle with the priest.

Santa Cruz Police Chief Jack Bassett said today his department is releasing little information about the nature of the attack or the kinds of injuries the priest suffered. He may have been dead for as long as 2½ hours before his son found the body, Bassett said.

"We're trying to finish up the crime scene and then see what the evidence tells us," the chief said.

Bassett said there are no suspects and the motive could be any one of a "half dozen" possibilities.

Several law enforcement agencies are working on the investigation, including the FBI, the state Department of Justice and Santa Cruz County

district attorney and sheriff's offices. Bassett said the FBI will try to develop a psychological profile of the killer.

Investigators have some physical evidence, including a partial handprint and some footprints. Some graffiti, which makes reference to Satanism, on an outer church wall is also being looked into.

Bassett today called for public help in solving the crime, asking for "anything and everything" in the way of information.

District Attorney Art Danner said this morning authorities need a major break in order to make an arrest.

Father John was praised by his parishioners, who credited him with strengthening the Greek Orthodox community in Santa Cruz County. The parish grew to some 80 families under his leadership.

"When we lost him, we lost the heart and soul of this community," said Paul Sandas, president of the church council. "If any good comes from it, maybe the community will want to continue to do the work he began."

Chancellor Adams said another priest will be appointed to the parish, but that it may take some time because of a shortage of clergy. A visiting priest will conduct services each Sunday until an appointment is made, he said.

Adams remembered Father John as a "kind, sensitive, young priest who was very dedi-

cated. He would never refuse anyone anything," Adams said.

Father John, a native of Greece, worked in San Francisco and Anchorage, Alaska, before coming to Santa Cruz in 1980.

He was appointed after a meeting in Watsonville, where petitions presented by 50 families persuaded the bishop to organize a Greek Orthodox parish.

Father John established the church in a former mortuary purchased by the parish four years ago. The parish had used temporary locations for services for two years previously.

Sandas said Father John was good at dealing with people and helped prevent petty bickering and disputes from developing among the parishioners.

"A small community like ours is really a fragile thing," Sandas said. "Father John had a knack of pulling everyone together and whatever needed to be done, he saw to it that it got done."

A trisagion, similar to a rosary, will be said at 7:30 tonight by Bishop Anthony from San Francisco, according to Western Diocese Chancellor James Adams. A divine liturgy will be held at 9:30 a.m. tomorrow with the funeral to follow at 11 a.m., Adams said.

The services will be at Father John's church, the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church, 223 Church St., Santa Cruz.