

Clergyman takes service to elderly

Sermons conducted at nursing homes

By Anne Burke
Daily News Staff Writer

Bishop David Leon Cooper has a solution for the frail elderly who can't make it to church.

Cooper takes church to them.

An Orthodox Catholic from Van Nuys, Cooper is something of an itinerant clergyman who rolls a large, wheeled trunk filled with religious icons, chalice, blessed clothes and huge candlesticks to any of several San Fernando Valley nursing and convalescent homes each Sunday.

Wearing green vestments, Cooper, 39, arranges his altar pieces atop whatever table the home offers and delivers an ecumenical worship service.

"I have everyone from Catholics to Armenian Apostolics — the whole spectrum. I have a few Jewish who come in just to watch the services," said Cooper, a former nursing home administrator.

Cooper works with another Orthodox Catholic bishop, the Rev. Miguel DeSoto of Eagle Rock. The two priests, who have given services at nursing homes for several years, are founders of the new Orders of the Missionaries of Mercy, an Orthodox Catholic health care chaplaincy dedicated to ministering to elderly people who Cooper says have been forgotten by many churches.

"This is a growing movement across the country. We feel the mainstream churches have pretty much forgotten these people," Cooper said. "It's been years since they've seen a mass right before their eyes. That's such a big difference for them.

"They've raised families, they have paid taxes and contributed to society all their lives. And here, in their twilight years when they need their community and they need support in various ways, (the church) falters."

Cooper says ordained clergy and lay people representing many faiths make regular visits to nursing homes.

"The problem is there are far too few of them and they're not



Lori Valesko/Daily News

The chapel at Valley Presbyterian Hospital. Bishop David Leon Cooper delivers services for elderly.

able to do Sunday services as we are," he said.

Working separately, the two priests say mass at 10 nursing and convalescent homes each month.

Cooper and DeSoto will be installed at a ceremony at 2 p.m. Sunday at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, 15520 Sherman Way, Van Nuys. They are officers of the Ecumenical Apostolic Chaplain Services, which is focusing attention on the rights of nursing home residents, Cooper said.

The bishops' services usually are held in activity rooms. Many worshipers, like 87-year-old Mar-

garet Fluke, arrive in wheelchairs.

"I enjoy (Cooper) very much. I like his messages and he seems so friendly, just like one of us," said Fluke, who lives at Sherwood Convalescent Hospital in San Fernando.

Cooper uses a modern Roman rite and invites worshipers to take Holy Communion.

"We tell them, raise your hand if you'd like to partake of Holy Communion and we just come around to them.

"Sometimes, the place will be so packed we can hardly get in between them."

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