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## FATHER BILL DINELLI His Parish Goes Up, Not Out

By Sister Carol Anne O'Marie, printed in the September 23, 1976 issue of the *Catholic Herald*

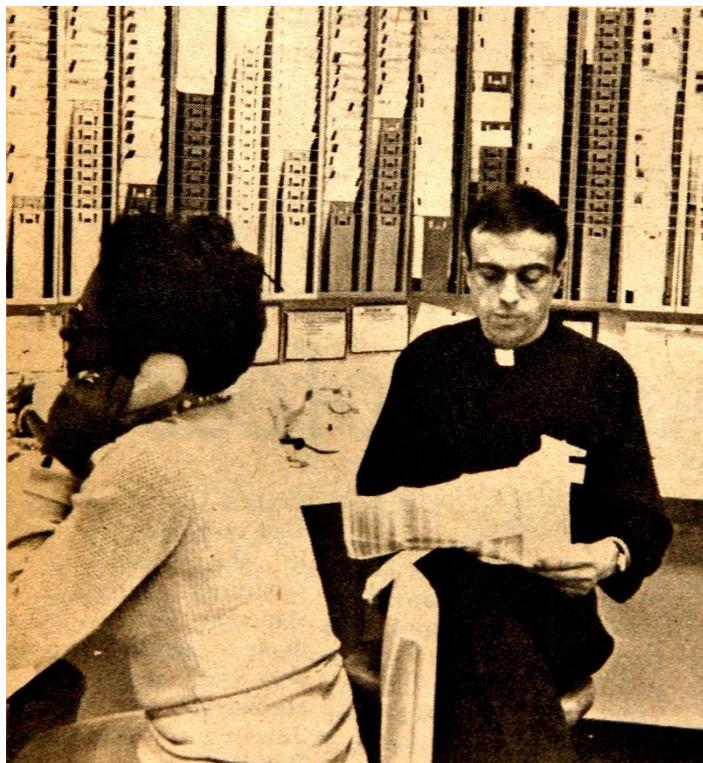


Photo by the *Catholic Herald*

### Father Dinelli Gets the Patient List as He Begins His Day

Since the Medical Center has no chapel, Father Dinelli celebrates daily Mass at the Carmelite Monastery on Stockton Boulevard. According to Father Dinelli, the Center's administration realizes the need for religion, but separation of Church and State is a very touchy area in the California University system.

A soft-spoken, sensitive man,, Father Dinelli claims that he is most at home in ministry to the sick. "I find deep satisfaction," he says, "in meeting the needs of those people who are most in need. Here I now I can make a real contribution."

Each morning Father Dinelli picks up his list of "parishioners" from the hospital's computer printout. Using this as his guide, he visits the intensive care unit and 30 to 40 patients each day. "Those who are seriously ill, he says, "I get to know the best. I have a chance to get below the surface."

Father Bill Dinelli considers himself a parish priest. His parish is just oddly-shaped; he goes up rather than out. "It's basically the same as any other parish," explains Father Dinelli, Catholic Chaplain to the eight-floor Sacramento Medical Center, major teaching hospital for the University of California, Davis, School of Medicine.

"I baptize, confirm, give Communion, anoint," he says. "The only thing I haven't done is marry someone. But, who can predict?"

Father Dinelli, who sees his role as pastoral as well as sacramental is on 24-hour call. His duties include the care of the Medical Detention Facility attached to the hospital.

The temptation, according to Father Dinelli, is for the chaplain on his daily rounds to try to cheer people up or just pass the time of day. A chaplain, he says, must touch, not avoid, the real issues. People in hospitals experience a wide range of feelings. Many are depressed, lonely or frightened. Some are looking for hope. All are in pain.

“If you can’t understand pain,” he says, “you cannot really minister to the sick.” At the end of the day, home for Father Dinelli is a small apartment within walking distance to the Center. “Some nights,” he says, “I just need to be alone.”

Working in this complex and changing “parish” has its bright side. Only a small minority of the patients in the 515 bed facility die. Some days not one death is recorded. “Most people at the Medical Center,” says Father Dinelli, “get well and go home!”



**Jimmy Duggan from St Paul Parish Receives  
The anointing of the sick from Fr Dinelli**



**James Rance from St Michael Church, Central Valley, Receives  
Holy Communion**