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'For me it's a privilege. It's very rewarding; an opportunity to make people aware that they can give quality of life.'

Father Elly Tavarro, speaking of his upcoming ride on a float



Photographs by DON KELLEN Los Angeles Times

SUPPORT: Father Elly Tavarro visits with kidney dialysis patient Jairo Estrada, 5, of Santa Ana at St. Joseph Hospital's renal center in Orange on Friday. The priest is now the chaplain at the hospital where his donation to his sister took place.

Organ donor to get a Rose Parade platform

Father Elly Tavarro gave his sister a kidney. He hopes his ride on a float will spur donations.

By DAVID HALDANE
Times Staff Writer

Father Elly Tavarro, an advocate of organ donations, has a motto: "God doesn't want your organs in heaven. He doesn't need your body, only your soul."

Tavarro has practiced what he preaches. Sixteen years ago, the Filipino priest came to America to donate one of his kidneys to his sister, Ritcha.

After the surgery at St. Joseph Hospital in Orange, he stayed on as the hospital's chaplain.

On New Year's Day, the 51-year-old priest called Father Elly by patients and peers, will be riding the Donate Life float in the 118th annual Tournament of Roses parade. And his sister, still depending on his kidney, will be watching from the Philippines.

Tavarro hopes his appearance encourages others to donate life-saving organs, which is the mission of the national non-profit organization, Donate Life America.

"For me it's a privilege," he said. "It's very rewarding; an opportunity to make people aware that they can give quality of life."

In December of 1990 when his younger sister experienced renal failure after the birth of her second child, Tavarro was the only one of five siblings whose kidney was a match.

Another sister, Lilia, a nurse at St. Joseph, put the family in touch with the hospital's renal center, which performed the transplant for free.

After waking from surgery, the priest asked whether his sister was OK. He said he was told she was doing very well because she received a "holy kidney."

Three months later Tavarro became the hospital's Catholic chaplain, a position he has held ever since.

"I wanted to repay the hospital's goodness in saving my sister's life," he said.

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ADDING HIS NAME: Jairo autographs the jacket that Father Tavarro will wear as he rides on the organization's Rose Parade float.

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[Donor, from Page B1]

In addition to offering daily Mass, the priest's duties include performing such sacraments as Communion, confession and last rites.

He also counsels patients in spiritual matters and makes it a point to visit every donor and recipient involved in the 30 to 40 kidney transplants performed at St. Joseph each year.

"I think it's an inspiration for them to see a life donor," Tavarro said.

Which is why, according to a hospital spokeswoman, the institution selected him as its first representative on a Rose Parade float.

"He was chosen because of his commitment to the hospital" and the example of his life, spokeswoman Ashley Anderson said.

The organ-giving priest pre-

pared for the parade by meeting Friday with kidney dialysis patients at the hospital's renal center.

There he passed out roses, and patients took turns autographing the jacket he'll wear in the parade.

On New Year's, Tavarro said, he looks forward to waving to four of his siblings and his 88-year-old mother — all of whom now live in the United States — who will be sitting in the grandstands.

Only one close family member will not be at the New Year's spectacle — his sister Ritcha, who lives in the Middle East. On New Year's Day, however, she will be with her children in the Philippines.

"She'll be watching us on TV," Tavarro said. "I'm very excited."

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