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The Rev. Angelo LaVasseur, center, is flanked by Angie Arsenault and John Madigan during a meeting last year of the 18-member Clustering Committee of the region's Catholic parishes. Father Angelo died on Sunday at the age of 56.

'A good shepherd'

Priest who served area was much-loved

BY EILEEN M. ADAMS
Staff Writer

RUMFORD — Parishioners of the Parish of the Holy Savior are mourning the death of the Rev. Angelo LaVasseur. They are also feeling a bit bewildered at the speed of the illness that killed him.

But they also know that he is now with the Lord, that he is face to face with Him, said Mary Theriault, a longtime parishioner of St. Athanasius and St. John in Rumford.

Father Angelo, 56, died Sunday at the Hospice House of Androscoggin Home Care and Hospice in Auburn. He had been diagnosed with a fast-moving cancer just three weeks ago.

"He was a very, very nice man, upbeat and cheerful and positive," said Theriault of Roxbury. "I loved his laugh. He'd say things and then he'd crack up."

She also enjoyed his sermons. "He was a teacher at heart and he always went into the history of everything. This made it more real for us," she said.

Mike Broderick, a parishioner of Our Lady of the Snow in Bethel, said Father Angelo's interpretation of scripture may have been considered a bit unorthodox.

"He had some remarkable views on scripture. You'd leave and think about what he said, reread the passage, then understand," he said.

For Pauline Gotto, secretary of the former St. Theresa's Church, which is one that was closed under the restructuring, Father Angelo was fun-loving and had a beautiful voice.

"He liked a good joke. He was good to work for," she said.

Sometimes, priests have housekeepers and cooks. Not Father Angelo, Gotto said.



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The Rev. Angelo LaVasseur served in area churches in his 25 years as a priest.

"He liked to do for himself and he did his own cooking. He liked to do his own thing," she said.

Among those things was his love of nature.

He and his beloved springer spaniel, Woody, often went kayaking and hiking. Or he would go fishing or skiing. He loved the outdoors. And he loved his dog.

"That dog was his companion. It was a big loss when Woody died," said Connie Venskus, a retired teacher at St. Athanasius and St. John School and a lector at the church.

Father Angelo presided over an extremely difficult time in the area Catho-

lic churches' history. Five churches combined to become Parish of the Holy Savior following nearly three years of meetings and planning. Two of those churches were closed under the restructuring.

"He came to us at the most difficult time in our church history. It was like a death of the parish," Theriault said.

"He had to bring so many people together. He tried very hard to bring us together and hopefully, his passing will be a way to bring people together," Venskus said.

A 25th celebration of his ordination as a priest was held less than a year ago, Theriault said.

"At least 300 people showed up and he was overwhelmed. He said he couldn't believe it, and couldn't believe it was all for him. I told him we loved him," Theriault said.

She also remembers his love of baptisms and the joy he received from holding the babies.

"The children loved him. He was a real sweetheart," said Theriault. "He tried to be a good shepherd."

"He will be missed. He was a hard worker and someone who cared an awful lot about the people," Venskus said.

The Rev. Al Jacques, who retired when Father Angelo came to his final parish in 2004, will fill in at the churches of the Parish of the Holy Savior in June and July, Gotto said.

The reception of the body is set for 4 p.m. Wednesday, followed by a wake until 8 p.m. On Thursday, the wake will continue from 9 to 10:45 a.m. On Thursday, a Mass of Christian burial, with Maine Bishop Richard Malone presiding, will be held at 11 a.m. All funeral events will be held at St. Athanasius and St. John Church.

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