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Murdered priest recalled for strong relationships

Laura Deavers Catholic News Service | Jul. 14, 2011

BATON ROUGE, La. -- A Louisiana Dominican priest who was found shot to death July 11 at his order's Mississippi retreat house "was a good priest and a good preacher" who "drew the best out of people," said an official of the late priest's province.

Father Edward Everitt was murdered while he was staying at a weekend retreat house owned by the Dominican friars in Waveland, Miss.

He was pastor of Holy Ghost Church in Hammond and Our Lady of Pompeii Church in Tickfaw in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

"It is tragic, but he preached hope for other people and we are going to continue that legacy," said Father Dave Caron, vicar provincial for the Dominican Province of St. Martin de Porres. He said Father Everitt often spent his days off at the house in Waveland.

According to a statement on the province's website, the retreat house was rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina.

On July 12, police arrested Jeremy Wayne Manieri, 31, of Waveland for Father Everitt's murder. He was apprehended in Polk County, Fla., southwest of Orlando, and had his first court appearance July 13.

At a news conference the day of the arrest, Waveland Police Chief Jimmy Varnell said the shooting appeared to be robbery related, pointing out that the priest's wallet was missing. Varnell was awaiting Manieri's extradition to Mississippi, which was expected to take a few days.

Manieri also was wanted on a warrant from Escambia County, Fla., for grand larceny, police reported. In 2006, he was convicted of a sex offense and is listed on the State of Mississippi's Sex Offender website.

Manieri worked as a maintenance man at the house where Father Everitt's body was found. The priest suffered a gunshot wound to the head.

Authorities say Manieri was driving Father Everitt's SUV, which was equipped with the auto tracking system OnStar. They used the GPS feature on the device to locate the vehicle at a motel.

Kathy Scott, secretary at St. Clare Church in Waveland, found Father Everitt's body. Holy Ghost parishioners contacted St. Clare Church after they had been unable to reach the priest on his cellphone. Scott went to the house to check on the priest and found him about 4:30 p.m.

Bishop Robert W. Muench of Baton Rouge said Father Everitt's murder was tragic. "I express my utter shock and profound mourning over the news of the murder of Father Edward Everitt. This tragic loss of Father Ed's life leaves a deeply felt void in all our lives.

"Together we pray to the author of all life to provide Father Ed with the peace of eternal life. May our grief be

seen in that perspective as we thank God for his valued life and priestly ministry," the bishop said.

Father Everitt wanted to be a priest for as long as he could remember, according to the Dominican Order's vocations website, which described the late priest as having a passion for preaching.

The website said that in his downtime, Father Everitt enjoyed spending time with family and friends in Waveland.

A native of Houston, Father Everitt was ordained in 1968, in Dubuque, Iowa, and celebrated his first Mass of Thanksgiving at Holy Rosary Church in Houston.

He attended the University of Houston; Loras College of Dubuque, Iowa; Aquinas Institute of Theology in Dubuque; and the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

He has served as chaplain and instructor at Edgewood High School in Madison, Wis., chaplain at the University of Wisconsin and Blessed Sacrament Parish in Madison, Wis., and Thomas More College in Covington, Ky., before being assigned to St. Albert the Great Chapel and Student Center at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond. He was named pastor of Holy Ghost and Our Lady of Pompeii in 2006.

Parishioners of the two parishes gathered for a memorial Mass July 12. "He will be greatly missed by the two parishes he served and by the Dominicans," Father Caron said.

[Contributing to this story were Barbara Chenevert in Baton Rouge and Shirley Henderson in Biloxi.]

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