

# Parish, pontiff support ailing child

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

CANANDAIGUA —With eight members in all — including a special 10-year-old in a wheelchair — the Gilges family is bound to garner attention upon arriving for Christmas Eve liturgy at St. Mary's Church.

Elie Gilges, the oldest of six children, is unable to see, walk or talk — the victim of a massive stroke following surgery for a brain tumor when she was only 8 months old. Elie's family has only lived in Canandaigua for five years but has been warmly welcomed by St. Mary's Parish, which offers weekly intentions for Elie. In fact, Elie's mother, Liz, became teary-eyed while recalling an elderly parishioner who died this past spring and had offered up her pain and suffering for Elie.

In late 1997 Elie also gained a supporter in none other than Pope John Paul II, who became aware of her illness during a brief conversation with her parents. According to Liz Gilges, she and her husband, Kent, were hoping to obtain a blessing for Elie from the pope during a planned visit



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

After lighting an Advent candle Dec. 7 at their Canandaigua home, Liz and Kent Gilges, along with their children, Avery (from left), Hannah, Alexander, Nicholas, Oliver and Elie, decide whom they will pray for. Nicholas raised his hand and asked that they pray for Elie, who has an inoperable brain tumor.

to Italy. Liz was told by numerous church officials that the audience wouldn't be possible, but she kept right on writing letters.

"Liz doesn't ever give up," Kent said with a chuckle.

That persistence paid off. While in Rome, the Gilges suddenly received a phone call instructing them to appear at the Vatican the next day. Just like that, Liz and Kent were among a group of perhaps 20 people to receive a face-to-face greeting by the pontiff.

When the pope stopped to meet the

Gilges, they showed him a photo of Elie, and Pope John Paul asked what was the matter with her. After Kent said Elie had a brain tumor, "He said 'You should pray together,'" Liz recalled. The pope then gave them two rosaries and blessed them.

Although their encounter wasn't long, Liz said she was touched deeply by the Holy Father. "I just felt he could look at my eyes and know a mother's pain," she said.

Since then, Liz has followed the pope's personal suggestion about prayer by having the family pray together frequently. The visit has also had a strong effect on Kent, who is not Catholic. "I think this pope is so admirable. I'm in church every Sunday," he said.

Kent and Liz paid tribute to the pope by naming their twin sons — whom Liz was carrying at the time of the 1997 visit without knowing it — Nicholas John and Oliver Paul. The 5-year-olds are kindergartners at St. Mary's School. Rounding out the Gilges clan are 7-year-old Alexander, a second-grader at St. Mary's School; Hannah, 3; and Avery, 8 months. Except for Elie, all the children are in good health.

Liz noted that Elie's tumor is benign, but is inoperable and growing slowly. Despite her afflictions, Elie has a sharp awareness of what's going on around her. "She knows the family, she knows pain. She smiles when she's happy. She loves to be held," Liz said.

Elie attends school at Mary Carola Children's Center and travels often with her family; she recently took in a production of "The Nutcracker" even though she was just recovering from pneumonia.

The Christmas season can evoke some strong feelings for the Gilges, such as last year when Kent was reminded of his daughter's infirmities while watching the crippled Tiny Tim character in "A Christmas Carol." "I just bawled my eyes out," he said.

Yet his wife said that Christmas can also be a sign of hope and rebirth for their family.

"When you look at the Christ child, you realize it's the chance to begin again each day," Liz said.

Happy Holidays



From

The LaRocca Family and Staff

Christmas Eve

We will be serving our regular dinner menu from 3pm to 7pm  
Closed Christmas Day

New Year's Eve

We will be serving our regular dinner menu from 4pm to 10pm

Open New Year's Day  
4pm to 9pm

Gift Certificates Available

**LaRocca's**

RESTAURANT AND PARTY HOUSE

250 Pixley Road, Rochester

585-247-4350

www.laroccasrestaurant.com

Call for Holiday Dinner Reservations

Mr. Dominic's

We wish you and your family a Very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year

Smoke-free, dining room (off street parking available)  
Delicious appetizers, soups, veal dishes, vegetarian, chicken, fish, and homemade pasta

10% Senior Discount on regular priced dinners with this ad!

Lunch: Tues.-Fri. 11-2  
Dinners Daily

Mon.-Sat. 4:30 - 9:00 p.m.  
Sundays 3:00 - 9:00 p.m.

4699 Lake Ave.

(585) 865-4630

www.mrdominics.com

Gift Certificates Available

Your Money Deserves the Best!

Gen-See Makes The Difference

Earn More Worry Less



Since 1975...

- Regular monthly checks
- Term 3, 4, or 5 years
- Minimum investment... \$5,000
- Rate of interest guaranteed for term of certificate

GEN-SEE CAPITAL CORPORATION  
CALL NOW... 1-800-507-4393