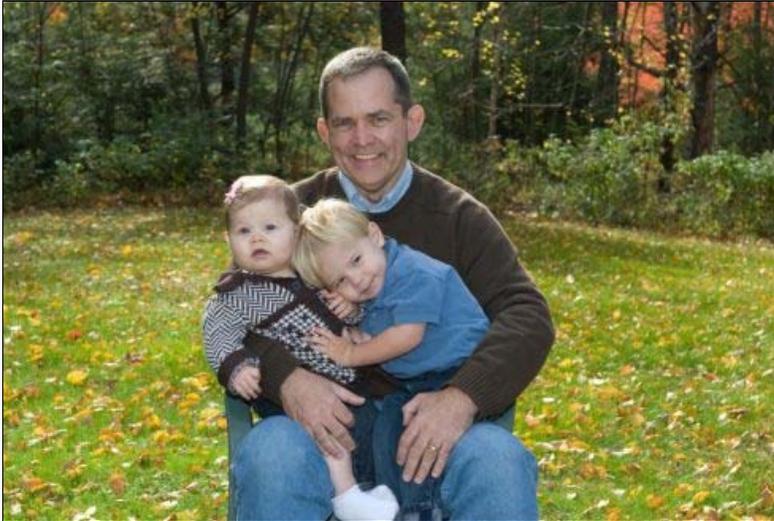


Categories: headlines

Date: Jan 23, 2011

Title: Franklin County parishioner, pro-life advocate, loses battle with ALS

REGIONAL



(Photos courtesy of Filiault family)

By Carolee McGrath

GREENFIELD -- Larry Filiault, a longtime pro-life advocate from Franklin County, died last night at his home after battling ALS. He was 53 years old.

“Larry touched the hearts of hundreds of people in our parishes and surrounding towns with his pro-life efforts, with his strong vibrant faith and with his love for so many people,” said Father Timothy J. Campoli, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Greenfield.

Filiault, the religious education coordinator for both Blessed Sacrament and Holy Trinity parishes in Greenfield, was diagnosed with ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, last July. Often referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease, ALS is a fatal progressive neuro-degenerative disease. It affects the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord causing muscle weakness and paralysis. Doctors say in Filiault’s case, the disease advanced rapidly. Father Campoli, who worked with Filiault for 17 years, was at his bedside when he died.

“He was not like an employee, he was a best friend,” Father Campoli told iobserve.

Msgr. Ronald G. Yargeau, pastor of Holy Trinity, said Filiault passed away shortly after a profile of him aired on the Springfield Diocese’s weekly newsmagazine program, “Real to Reel.” The story highlighted Filiault’s faith and courage, even though he was suffering.

“I think it’s Divine Providence that it was to air last night,” said Msgr. Yargeau. “As it was airing and people were watching it and it was giving great hope to people, he died.” Msgr. Yargeau pointed out he

also died on Jan. 22, the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the landmark Supreme Court decision which legalized abortion in this country.

“Larry has been such a strong support for life. It is amazing that it happened on that date,” Msgr. Yargeau said. “I think it was Divine Providence and probably helping us all understand that we have an obligation to protect life.”

Filiault has been a voice for the unborn for more than 30 years. Every year, he took dozens of people with him to Washington, D.C., for the annual March for Life. Not only did he organize the bus trips, but he also was a major supporter of Alternatives, a crisis pregnancy center in Greenfield. He founded Catholics for Life in Franklin County. In addition, year after year he rallied people to attend the annual Mother’s Day Dinner in Agawam, sponsored by Pioneer Valley Massachusetts Citizens for Life.



When parishioners from both Blessed Sacrament and Holy Trinity found out about Larry’s illness last summer, they immediately came together and raised enough money to send him and his wife, Maureen, on a pilgrimage to the shrine at Lourdes, France. Father Campoli went with them. “Someone in the parish came to me and said, ‘You know we should take him to Lourdes. So we started thinking about it and we were blessed because people came forward and offered us assistance to get there,’” said Father Campoli.

Lourdes is known as a place of miracles. It is there in 1858 where the Virgin Mary appeared in a grotto to a young peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous, 18 times. It is believed that the Blessed Mother told Bernadette to drink from the fountain in the grotto. There was no water there, so Bernadette dug in the ground where Mary instructed her, and a spring began to flow. Water is still flowing there today. Each year, millions of pilgrims go to Lourdes to immerse themselves in the baths as a means of reconciliation and healing.

“In Lourdes the VIP are the sick and especially those in wheelchairs,” said Father Campoli. “And the real healing comes when you’re there especially coming out of the baths ... It’s okay, God’s with you, our Blessed Mother is with you. It gave you a sense of peace.”

Maureen Filiault, Larry’s wife of 28 years, told Catholic Communications in November that Larry’s diagnosis was no doubt a devastating blow to the couple, and their four children. “It was probably the worst day of our life,” Maureen recalled. She added that both she and Larry were grateful for the opportunity to travel to Lourdes. “The pilgrimage was filled with peace and acceptance of God’s will and knowing that God is going to be with us throughout this whole thing and he has a big plan for us.”

Before he died, Larry shared his story and his suffering with parishioners in Greenfield. “Suffering in a sense can be a grace from God,” he said. “It’s hard to look at it that way. Sure I struggle looking at it that way. But many times, I see it shown to me so clearly and just the way God works through your suffering and the whole key is to unite your suffering to Christ.”

Father Campoli said Filiault was an inspiration right up to the end. He even organized the bus trip going to this year's March for Life from Blessed Sacrament. "He was a living example of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. I'm sure those 50 million unborn children were there to greet him for his undaunted efforts for life."

A wake for Larry Filiault will be held at Blessed Sacrament Church in Greenfield on Wednesday, Jan. 26 from 4 to 7 .pm. A funeral Mass will be held on Thursday, Jan. 27 at 10 a.m., also at Blessed Sacrament. In lieu of flowers, donations are being accepted for a college fund for Filault's two younger children. Donations can be sent to Greenfield Savings Bank, care of William Freeman, 400 Main St., P.O. Box 1537, Greenfield, MA 01302-1537.