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An Inspiration to Many

Peter Harris will be remembered as a very cheerful and optimistic family man with a creative mind.

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He died at the age of 78 from oesophageal cancer, with his wife Yvonne and children Kelly, Michelle and Keiran by his side.

Peter grew up in Sydney, Australia. He began working in the printing business and later moved on to the

arts/media industries. Providentially one of the assignments that came to him in 1978, was the printing of a newsletter of Mgr Josemaria Escriva, who had died in 1975, and was canonised in 2002. He maintained contact with Opus Dei after the assignment and soon found himself on a retreat in the Blue Mountains, on the outskirts of Sydney, which was preached by the late Fr John Masso, who was at that time the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Australia.

Following the retreat Peter started receiving ongoing spiritual direction from the Work and then was asked if he would like to pray about a possible vocation. He was open to the idea but his main concern was his ability to do apostolate.

“Evangelising is not my thing,” he once said but he soon learnt that apostolate is done mainly through friendship, something Peter had no problems with.

His spirit of service made him available to new workers in the companies where he worked, and many of them have remembered his initiative for many years, especially in the last few weeks of his life.

In the formation seminars he attended he always gave an optimistic -- and funny -- tone to get-togethers, especially when he compered the traditional show. He had jokes and his creative streak had everyone enjoying the get-togethers with a lot of laughter.

He had great prestige at work (John Sands' Printers, Australian Consolidated Press, Murdoch Magazines) and was highly regarded by all of his bosses and co-workers. Many younger colleagues saw him as a mentor. He had many good ideas for advertising in the magazines, always with a high moral tone

including in publications directed mainly to women.

One of his interests was creating board games, a hobby which he took quite seriously. He was always very keen on selling one of his ideas to a manufacturer.

He created a project which he called “Inspirations”, initially to encourage a co-worker in distress. Every day he would send an email, with a quote or a maxim, accompanied by a personal comment. Unbeknown to him until the last week of his life, he touched thousands of people, many of whom he had not met physically, but who considered him as a friend and a mentor for the advice they received through his Inspirations. A selection of several hundred letters he received one week before he died follow:

“I don't even know how to begin justifying the impact you made on

me, and thousands across the globe. You shared not only your own powerful words, but those of others, and you did that every day to create community and pay forward positivity and hope. This was your choice and commitment, and one that I will be eternally grateful for.”

“You have truly made a difference in many people’s lives.”

“At Mass on Sunday, Father Peter reminded us of the importance of living our lives to honour God through our gifts to others. My thanks Peter for the morning gifts you’ve given me over the past five years.”

Often these “Inspirations” were forwarded to other people. Less than 12 hours before he died he joked with the person that looked after him about his ability to “evangelise”.

He was very faithful to his spiritual Plan of Life, to the last day. and

always thankful for the assistance he was given, including the visits he received from quite a number of other faithful of Opus Dei. All of them enjoyed the chats they had, which were beneficial to both sides.

He was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer about five years ago. The prognosis was bad from the beginning, but he was, in the words of his oncologist, “irrepressible”. He underwent several serious operations, and managed to recover. He received the Anointing of the Sick on several occasions. He continued to attend the means of formation and was faithful to the Plan of Life to the last day.

He died in the early hours of the morning of Monday, 11th of November. On Sunday he received Holy Communion and the Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum. In the afternoon he prayed the prayers

recited daily by the faithful of Opus Dei and did some time of mental prayer, although he was already nodding off, for which he apologised every time. In the last few hours he was advised to repeat his favourite aspiration: “Jesus I put my trust in you” and he asked Our Lady to take him by the hand.

His funeral was attended by hundreds of family, friends, former colleagues, and many people who had benefited from his cheerful and sound advice. And shortly afterwards his “Inspirations” of the last ten years have started once more.