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A Gentle Yess ...

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A Gentle Yes . . .

Rev. John Eagan, S.J., a theology teacher at Marquette University High School in Milwaukee, wrote the following letter on March 19, 1987, to his host of friends, colleagues and former students. We felt it would be of great interest to our readers.

March 19, 1987

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

First, let me thank you for your care and concern and prayers—for your notes and flowers and phone calls. This means very much to me.

I'd like to write this letter to cue you into what has happened and how I'm feeling about it.

From mid-February on I've had trouble with shifting pains in my abdomen. This was first diagnosed as a virus affecting the muscles and I was told to rest. That didn't help. Two weeks ago I started getting jaundiced and lost my appetite, at which my doctor hospitalized me and prescribed intensive testing. On Friday the 13th I had a CAT scan, bone scan, and chest X-ray. On Saturday the 14th Dr. Henry Wengelewski brought in the radiologist's report and interpreted it for me. The CAT scan showed numerous shadows on the liver. These shadows are clusters of malignant cancer cells. They are 98-99% sure of that diagnosis. Dr. Doug Olen will give me a second opinion on the CAT scan in a few days. The primary site cancer, however, is most probably in the pancreas—from there it metastasized into the liver. I asked him how long this had been developing—his response was: maybe 5 or 6 years. And that makes sense—for the last 6 years I've felt all sorts of subtle signs of things going wrong inside my body—things that puzzled me profoundly and made my last few years of teaching very difficult. My doctor told me frankly that these cancers are two of the most virulent—that there is no cure for either—with chemo or radiation the most they can do is delay the process and give me some added weeks or months. But these drugs also have tough side effects.*

This morning start to each day has over the years become the foundation and parameter of my life. So now when the Lord moves in and clearly asks me to travel this way with Him, I find that yes to Him coming from deep places. And a sense of calm—all is well—I'm in His hands—He'll give me His love and His strength to walk the way till the end.

- 3) One of the finest things the Society of Jesus has given me is my yearly 8-day retreat. Looking back, I'd say starting in 1981, I've been blessed with landmark retreats. They have had a profound effect on me. Each has given a stronger and deeper attraction to the very Person of the Lord and a growing desire to be with Him. It's like a deep pull inside, an undertow. And this in a way I feel powerless to describe—though I'm trying to do it in the journal type book I have been working on. With the last six years then as my background, then the cancer thing comes along . . . and again, here is the Lord of my life moving in on me and telling me—"Come home, John, close to me. I want you to be with me where I am—I want to share my joy, my love, and risen life with you. It will be grand and it will be forever." And so deep down I feel myself saying yes, let's go. I want to be with God and basically, I'm curious as hell about risen life.

Those of you who know me well, know that I'm a person who loved to take journeys. So, here I am, at the last and most important journey of my life to the side of the Lord. Please pray that I may make this last journey in peace—in strong hope of the Resurrection and in growing desire to see face to-Face this Incomprehensible God to whom we give our lives.

Your prayer—your support and encouragement and your humor in the days ahead will mean much to me. Thanks for listening.

John Eagan, SJ

Father Eagan passed away on Sunday morning, April 12, 1987, in his room at the Marquette High School Jesuit residence. He had taught his beloved teenagers through the previous Friday. Gesu Church, on the Marquette University campus, overflowed with relatives, friends and students who attended his funeral and paid their last farewell.