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Dear friends,

I hope that you were among the hundreds of people that worshipped at our two churches on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. I trust that the services spoke to you of the extraordinary reality of Jesus being born at Bethlehem. I hope that you found the worship experience warm. Warm in the welcome that you received, and also physically warm. Both church buildings now have the benefit of 21st century heating systems. I also trust that you found the experience illuminating. Both buildings also have 21st century lighting systems. The combination of new lighting and heating has greatly enhanced the two buildings. If you were generous enough to help us pay towards this work, then everyone is grateful.

As we know, we can worship God in any circumstance and situation. However, human experience tells us that worship can be enhanced by a beauty. Our ordinand Christiania attended her first service at Fryerning at the end of November. She said to me, "I wish you could invite more people to come into the church. It is so beautiful. It would be hard to find a more beautiful church". The new lush carpet adds to the décor. When Frances Drake was there she said, "Patrick, I can feel myself sinking into the carpet!" We still need to buy some new furniture for the new vestry, and we are looking into what we feel is necessary. We are also looking to re-establish the use of the sound system at Fryerning. This will help generally. Of the £120,000 raised for the work, we still have some available to pay for these items.

At Ingatestone, the new lighting has emphasised something that we already knew – that the general condition of the walls requires some attention. The new choir stalls, heating and lighting have cost about £56,250. Gifts and donations, especially from the Gift Day raised £55,109. We will be looking to raise some more money for the general decoration and also to

make the Petre Chapel a more usable area.

Both our treasurers, Martin Taylor for Ingatestone and Roy Garnham, are happy to talk with anyone about the financial situations in the churches. The great generosity towards these much needed projects has had a detrimental effect on our regular giving. At Fryerning we are projecting a £7,000 deficit of income over expenses for the year. At Ingatestone we are projecting a deficit of £2,000. The vast majority of this expenditure is our parish share. This is the money we pay through the deanery towards the ministry in the Diocese of Chelmsford. The cost of parish clergy to the Diocese is over £15 million. Nearly £2 million is paid towards church schools. There are also other costs, including pre-ordination training. Please remember that the Diocese of Chelmsford covers the entirety of the old county of Essex – down to the Thames, across to the coast and up to the Suffolk border. Such a diverse Diocese has many areas of poverty that need to be supported by the more affluent parts of the Diocese. This system of supporting others is also recognised nationally by the Church of England. Our Diocese receives help from the wider church because of this reality. For 2009 the Parish Share for Ingatestone is £34,749. For Fryerning the share is £22,042. The highest share in our Deanery is Shenfield, with £129,066. In fact of the 21 churches in the Deanery of Brentwood, six churches have a higher share than Ingatestone.

In 2008 the Diocese launched a Giving Strategy. In this it was noted that on average people paid 3% of their take home pay to the church. If they paid 5% there would be no financial difficulties. We are advised that Christians should be giving generally 10%. Of this 5% towards your local church and 5% towards your own chosen charities. In times of economic hardship, we have to consider prayerfully where we choose to cut back.

A New Year is a good time to re-assess our priorities. We know that our communities value the churches and the ministry that happens through them. Thank you for all you do to support us.

Yours in Christ, Patrick