

The Rectory, 1 Rectory Close, Fryerning Lane, Ingatestone,  
CM40DB 01277352562  
[patrick.sherring@ingatestoneparishchurch.org.uk](mailto:patrick.sherring@ingatestoneparishchurch.org.uk)

Dear friends,

When you are child there is a great sense of excitement around the markers of a year. There is your birthday, other people's birthdays, Christmas, Easter and the New Year. They all feel like significant occasions. We should often remind ourselves that Jesus said that unless we become like a small child we cannot be part of his kingdom. As with everything he said, this had a complex meaning, but one of the things he meant was the sheer enjoyment of being alive. It is so sad to see people who have lost that spark in relation to life. Our life is a great gift from God. Nowhere are we told that it is going to be easy and without problems or difficulties. But we are told God will be with us to strengthen us through all that happens in life. So we should face life positively. Yet our cynicism is often there just below the surface, waiting to spoil our appreciation of God's gift to us.

When we are a child, New Year holds that special fascination of being able to start again. There is the anticipation of a whole year laid out before us. What will happen in that year? Where will we go? Who will we see? What new skill will we learn? In our adult lives we hang on to this through our planning and anticipation of holidays. But we lose much of the sense of life being different. What difference does it make if it is one minute to midnight or one minute after? 2007 or 2008? Of course in some ways it does make no difference. The wind still blows, the sun still rise and life goes on. But we like to mark the change of the New Year by being a little introspective, looking into our own lives and seeing if there is some way that we can improve ourselves, something that we can do to make ourselves just a bit better. It is usually about giving something up, like smoking or some form of personal indulgence. But it lasts barely into the New Year. Then we feel bad about our own weakness and failure. Experience of this leads to us dismissing the whole idea of New Year's resolutions. Let us just carry on as always.

May I be so bold as to suggest for 2008 that we make a collective resolution to face the future positively? Let us do this by making 2008 a year of Hope and Prayer. The local Churches Together have decided to be part of the national initiative Hope 2008. I have previously written about this in the Towers and spoken at our PCCs and at the New Year's Eve service before the wonderful fireworks. The older children in the Church of England Junior School will be receiving a booklet for use throughout Lent that encourages them to be good neighbours and to think of others. In the Hope 2008 literature there is much made of the idea of 1,000 hours of kindness. Our villages are kind places and many people do care for others. But there are also many vulnerable and isolated people. Let us offer the whole of our community a sense of Hope in 2008. Not just in words, but also in actions.

Part of the Hope 2008 initiative is re-emphasising the importance of prayer. A survey published in November stated that nearly half of all adults in this country pray every day, believing their prayers make a difference. In our communities that is around 2,500 people praying daily. Just stop and think for a moment about that. The Week of prayer for Christian Unity has the usual daily prayer services. These will all be on the thereof Hope 2008. The third Wednesday each subsequent month will see a Churches Together prayer meeting at the URC 8-9 p.m. The Churches Together Lent Course will be on understanding more of the Lord's Prayer. In our two churches we will be looking at developing initiatives for prayer and the way that we can more easily pray for each other. This re-energising the power of prayer will, I believe, bring a new sense of hope to our communities.

In prayer we come before God of Father just as a small child with their parents. We acknowledge how vulnerable we are as a baby. The reality that Jesus was speaking to was that we are always vulnerable. To acknowledge that is the beginning of our appreciation for the need to pray, both for us, for others and the wider world. I pray 2008 will be a year epitomised by hope.

Yours In Christ, *Patrick*