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Dear friends,

I know it is a cliché, but time really does appear to pass quicker the older we get. Already we are half way through this year. It does not feel possible. On the 16th of this month it will be the 8th anniversary of the service that was held jointly with Revd. Frances Drake to celebrate the beginning of our ministries in the two benefices. Eight years that have seen many changes in all of our lives and eight years that have witnessed changes in our churches. It is a great joy that so many more people are now involved and engaged with our churches. It was particularly thrilling on Easter Day, where I shared all three of the morning services with Sue. We were amazed to have a congregation at 8 o'clock at Ingatestone of 29. This is the largest congregation at an 8 a.m. service for many years. This was followed by a packed church for the 9.45 service. What was particularly encouraging was that the congregation was spread across all age groups, with a large number of families with young children. We then went to Fryerning, where the congregation was over 50, again the largest for an Easter Day service for many years, and also one that reflected both the congregations that attend our traditional services and also the Family service. In an age when all we ever read about Christianity in the media is negative and we hear about decline in church attendances and the shutting of churches, we have much to be thankful for here in our communities.

But we must not be complacent. Even with well over 200 people at our two churches on Easter Day, and I know good numbers at the other village churches, there are still a great many people in our villages that never attend church. Reaching them is our collective responsibility. At all the services across Easter I encouraged attendees to tell their family, friends, work colleagues etc. that they had attended church over Easter and why they had attended. I wonder how many did? We all have a responsibility to tell others about our faith. If you do not tell them, who will?

We have been following the course *Changing Lives for Good* monthly at Ingatestone Church. It has been wonderful to see people really engaging with difficult issues relating to how we live our lives as Christians, the differences our faith makes to us in all contexts. This has clearly been one of the most important activities we have engaged with in the last eight years. We need to look at ways of providing opportunities for other to follow this course.

I am delighted that on 14th of June at Ingatestone Church we will be hosting the Civic Service for the new Mayor of Brentwood. We believe that this is the first time the church here has ever hosted such a service. The out-going Mayor attended our Churches Together New Year's Eve service this year. It has been historically a role of the Church of England to provide prayers and services to support those in important civic positions. We pray regularly for the Queen, the Government and also those in elected political offices. It is important that we remember that we can ask for God's help for all people and it is good to remind us all that we can ask for God's help and guidance in all circumstances. Archbishop John Sentamu has been reminding everyone of the Christian heritage. To quote him, "For 2,000 years people in every country and culture have discovered Jesus Christ has brought them to God."

During this month we are continuing our exciting series of Churches Together evenings looking at each of the denominations represented in the village. What is clear is that each of the denominations has the same goal; to call people into a relationship with Jesus Christ and for them to live a life that reflects their faith. We all have different emphases, but we can and do all work together, with no sense of competition or rivalry, because we share common aims. We all want our village to be somewhere that honours Jesus Christ.

As time passes, we all know that we come closer to that great day when Jesus will come again. May we continue to all grow in love, faith and services as that time draws ever nearer.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*