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Dear friends,

It had been many years since Easter has been so much in the consciousness of the many people who rarely, if ever, consider going to Church. The release of Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ* has caused much controversy. Who would have thought a film in Aramaic and Latin could attract such large audiences and gross so much money? Yet this film is a box-office success. Why should this be the case? Reaction to the film is mixed, but Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "it is worth a life-time of sermons". If somehow all the publicity has failed to reach you, the film aims to recapture the shocking reality of the sufferings of Jesus in the last twelve hours of his human life. No horrific detail is spared as we see graphically the suffering of Jesus. Somehow this has become sanitised to us, but Jesus himself foresaw the reality. Look again at his reactions in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew all too well the reality he was facing. We like to avoid thinking about it or forget it all together. It will be interesting to see the reactions of those who see the film. Will it lead them to join with communities of people who understand the reasons for Jesus' suffering and the implications for humanity? We can pray that it does. They will all be welcome in churches.

Fundraising continues for the new vestry project at St. Mary the Virgin, Fryerning. The two presentations at Fryerning Hall focussed on the reality that the Church has been the focal point for the community over 900 years. This is undeniable. The point was also made that if there is to continue to be any sense of community in that small village, then the church needs to be upgraded to meet present needs and also future opportunities. It is where children have been baptised, people married and funerals have taken place throughout those hundreds of years. In recent years there has been a large increase in the number of baptisms, showing that a younger generation of residents, often with minimal previous contact with any church, still see this as the natural and appropriate action to undertake to celebrate the birth of a child. Throughout all of our churches there has been a growth in the number of people desiring to be married where countless couples have been married throughout the centuries. Fryerning Church is the setting for funeral or memorial services for residents to be buried in the cemetery. Attendance near three figures

at the Christmas Crib and Carol services, growing congregations at the Family service, and faithful people at the other regular services show, that despite serving a community of only around 400 people, the church has a continuing relevance and a distinct future. As the fundraising brochure proclaims, 'Looking forward after 900 years'. If you would like a brochure sent to you, please contact me directly. Donations, made to Fryerning PCC should be sent to Roy Garnham, Honorary Treasurer, Fryerning PCC, Wellmead, Fryerning Lane, Ingestone, CM4 0NN.

I know that all of the churches in the two benefices are special places to many people. We all know that God is everywhere and can be worshipped anywhere. Yet there are places which in Celtic Christianity are described as 'thin places' where something about the atmosphere makes focussing on God so much easier. There is this quality about our ancient buildings, with their hundreds of years of prayer and their beautiful settings. Iona, in the Hebrides, is somewhere that has a unique feel. I know a surprising number of local people who have been there for a few hours and experienced the feeling and atmosphere. Unlike many centres for pilgrimage, Iona maintains the atmosphere of a 'thin place'. This is particularly true when the day visitors leave. Elsewhere in the magazine are details of the Pilgrimage I am attempting to organise to Iona for July 2005. As accommodation on the island is so limited, we need to book very early. Do consider being part of this trip. For it to be viable, we need to be a group of at least 20.

I hope you followed our daily journey through Lent with our book of meditations. I know these were appreciated by many people in the villages, and sent to people beyond. I have had appreciative letters from a number of people, including Bishop John Perry and other senior church figures, as well as local people. Now that you have finished, there are many publications that can encourage you to continue the habit of daily Bible reading. Or simply choose a book from the Bible, maybe a Gospel, or Paul's letter to the Philippians, and read a few verses each day. If you would like any help or advice, please be in contact.

As we gather in church during the Easter period, let us remember the great personal cost that Jesus endured on our behalf. Let us rejoice together, as people from our villages have done for hundreds of years. Let us look to the future, for our communities, our churches and ourselves, with renewed hope thanks to all that Jesus has done for us.
Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.

