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Dear friends,

I would like to thank everyone who came along to the Ingatestone Parish Room on the 27th of February. It was wonderful to celebrate my birthday with so many friends. The walls were bulging and we did not think we could manage to seat so many people! It was good to see people from both Churches naturally mixing together. I was particularly pleased to see so many people who attend the Family Service at Fryerning come along and bring their children. Those who know me well know that I am rarely tongue tied. Yet when called on to make a speech, with a heckler calling out, “not a sermon”, I genuinely found it hard to say anything. Thank you all for a real Christian family experience. As some wag said, “Well done for your first fifty years, Patrick. Now for the next fifty!”

We have reached the time of year for the Annual Meetings and elections for membership of the Parochial Church Councils. We have a number of people who are eager to join the PCCs of both Churches. When I told this to someone who has served on a PCC for many years in another area, he was shocked. “Why would anyone want to be on a PCC! I cannot think of anything more boring. I am very pleased to no longer be on the PCC.” I found this a very sad statement. Of course PCC meetings have their regular updating reports concerning on-going matters. That is inevitable. The question is, are these matters simply related to “keeping the show on the road”, simply maintenance issues of survival? If that is all a PCC is about, then no-one would want to be a member. The PCC should be a dynamic body that looks to share with the clergy in the mission of the Church. A body that can see God at work building His kingdom amongst us. A body that has different gifts. A body with a vision for the way forward and energy and enthusiasm to work towards achieving God’s goals. Sometimes our PCCs have not always been quite like this, but this should be our task, to work together for the

growth of God’s kingdom in the place where he has put us. At Ingatestone our PCC meets monthly and there are sub-committees. At Fryerning we meet every two months, again with sub-committees. At both Churches these committees can involve those not on the PCC, those who can bring further expertise in a particular area. I thank those people who have been loyal members of our PCCs for their time and commitment. I welcome those new members. These are important times in the development of both Churches.

As we journey through life there are many milestones. Having a 50th birthday is one of them. You realise that it is very unlikely that you will make it to your 100th. So there is inevitability in assessing all you have done to date, together with looking to those things you wish to achieve in however long you have left. Another milestone is being confirmed. However, unlike a major birthday, we do not necessarily know where in life this will happen. For to be confirmed we have to be able to decide that those promises made on our behalf when we were baptised are words that we can make our own. For some people this might be as young as aged eleven. For others it might be when we were much older. I was thirty three when I was confirmed. Within three years I was in specifically Christian work and in seven years at Theological College studying for the ministry. Being confirmed was certainly a milestone to me. That is every Christian’s experience. For we publicly commit ourselves to be open to God’s grace and his leading and developing us. For confirmation is not a dead end. Rather, it is a whole new quality of life journey. For me, it was like suddenly driving on the motorway after a life on B and A roads. The quality of my life changed. Of course, some people are afraid of driving on the motorway. But isn’t life about fulfilling our potential? There is nothing worse than looking back and saying, “if only I had done...” I believe we can only achieve our full God-given potential by being committed Christians. The Confirmation service for the two benefices is on October 12th at St. Giles, Mountnessing. If you are not confirmed, and feel God is encouraging you to make that day a milestone in your life, talk to either myself or Sue as soon as possible.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.

