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Dear friends,

On a recent visit to one of our church members I met her neighbour. A lady in her 70s, she was a member of our local Catholic Church. She was pleased to meet me, though was not sure about my name. She appeared rather surprised when I said that I had preached on a number of occasions in the local Catholic Church. I have in fact preached in all the local churches across the denominations. She commented on how much they liked Msq. David and I agreed. I then said that it was rather odd that all the local ministers were very supportive of Churches Together and doing things together, far more so than the people in the congregations. She smiled and agreed.

The conversation then turned to a friend of hers. She is another lady in her 70s, someone who has lived in the village for over 50 years. She had apparently been to a wedding recently in St. Edmund and St. Mary Parish Church, taken by Sue Cruse. She said to her friend, "I have never been to a wedding taken by a woman before. She took it very well, but haven't they got a man in that place?" I told this story to the P.C.C. when we considering being an out-ward looking church. Their collective jaws dropped! How is it possible for someone to have so little knowledge about the church? We decided that we need to work much harder to ensure that we get our message across about who we are, what we offer and what we do.

The reality is that this lady in her 70s is an example of many people to be found in our communities. They simply have no interest whatever in the church. I support completely the project that our local Elim have been undertaking, to visit ever property in Ingatestone on Sunday mornings. Apparently a lot of people say they are C. of E. but have no knowledge of our church. This is both an answer to make the Elim folk go away and a historical legacy – if you are nothing you are C. of E. We wish that historical legacy continued in financial support! Someone

told a P.C.C. member recently that my stipend was paid by the Government out of her taxes! She also said the Government paid for the up-keep of the church. But we should not be too amazed by this lack of knowledge and indifference. Recently the Elim folk have been getting the answer on the doorstep, "We don't do church". People with no interest who see no relevance in what we do or what we say. In reality we all know this is true as we all know people who have this attitude. Before I became a Christian, I had this attitude as well. I would drive past the church between home and school, the church at which I had been Christened, and not give it a second thought.

Of course the situation is not doom and gloom. We have had more weddings this year than in the previous year, the bell ringers at both churches were over-employed in June! We have a very large number of baptisms this year. There have been more funerals, with people realising that the two churches exist, amongst numerous other things, to hold services for those who lived in the community. There is really no comparison between a service in either church, followed by a committal at Chelmsford Crematorium, to having the whole service at the Crematorium. Of course we are happy to do these services for anyone and to take services at the Crematorium.

The reason for wanting the church to be known by people is nothing about self-promotion. I really do not mind that people do not know who I am or who Sue is. The important reality is that people know who Jesus is and experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. A P.C.C. member said that recently someone had said to him that he had stopped taking the Towers because it had become too religious! I also recall someone saying to me five years ago that they hoped I was not too religious! Well I know some people have odd understandings of the word 'religious' but we are a church that exists to tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ and demonstrate the importance of that reality in their lives. If that is religious, then we are 'guilty as charged'.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*