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Dear friends,

I am sure that family and friends have asked you at some point, “So what is so good about living in your village?” Ingatestone and Fryerning people are very good at detailing the positives. It is undeniable that there is a real sense of community. Geographically we are a very distinct place, with the railway and the A12 giving easy access to London, yet enabling us to be far enough away to feel very distinct. Brentwood, Billericay and Chelmsford are all very conveniently close, but feel like different places. There are many of us living in our community who grew up in what can be described as London sprawl. One place simply merges into another. Not so here. Margaretting, Mountnessing, Stock and Blackmore all have distinct characters and are good places. I think we know we are blessed to live here.

That does not answer the question as to why this is a good place to live. For me, one of the important factors is that people still value the churches and the mission that is undertaken. Christmas might already feel like a distant memory, but the numbers of people who attend church at that season remains remarkable and encouraging. On the Victorian evening back in early December lines of people stretched down the path to try and get into the church. The Infant’s school and C. of E. Junior school had nativity performances that involved all the children. The Anglo European School concert contained the usual mixture of sacred and secular. At Christmas, the faith that has shaped our community feels almost tangible. Perhaps the snow added to this sense of a special time of year.

The Christian faith has played, and continues to play, a significant part within the life of our communities. I would hope that any child educated through our church school would want to be married in future years in one of the churches. I would hope that those baptised there as babies, and we have had an

enormous increase in recent years, would want to know more about the faith and make the personal commitment through confirmation. We will be having a confirmation service at St. Edmund and St. Mary Parish Church on the 2nd of September. We need to start working towards that date now, with courses for those who want to take this step. I would hope also that those baptised as infants would want to worship regularly in our churches and becoming involved in developing the Christian community. When the time came to organise services to celebrate the life of family members, I would hope that they would look to the church as the nature venue. I would also hope they would want to take the opportunities we offer to reflect on the faith and grow in understanding.

“So what is good about living in your village?” For me, near the top of the list would be the strength of the Churches Together. The ministers really do all see themselves and the churches as complimentary to each other. We all value each other’s churches and what they bring to the opportunities for expressing faith and service. There are opportunities to come together throughout the year, but the season of Lent brings an extra dimension to this reality. The numbers who attend our Lent courses are a real positive. If you have never attended these discussion-based evenings, why? During these meetings on Tuesday evenings, beginning on February 23rd we will be looking at the last week in the life of Jesus. These evenings will give us the opportunity to reflect together on a week that has arguably had more effect on human history than any other. I pray you will give serious consideration to attending. It would be good to be at every evening, but if that is not possible then even one meeting would be thought provoking.

Lent is when we have our booklet of daily mediations. Work on these begins in August and they a major task. Thanks are particularly due this year to Elise Gennings who undertook the not inconsiderable task of compiling them. I know of no other community where all ministers of the local churches come together to produce a set of daily reflections. So the importance of the churches to the local community and the strength of the Churches Together would be my answer to the question.

Yours in Christ, Patrick.

