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Dear friends,

At the May Bank Holiday weekend we had a baptism as part of the Family Service at Fryerning. Little Lucy was Christened and despite the water being cold she was enthusiastic about the whole experiencing, smiling throughout and not crying. Rachel and Paul had been married at the church two years before and are regulars at the Family Service. As I looked around there were five other children of various ages there who had all been baptised at the church. There were also three adults who I had baptised and three people who were confirmed last year, together with one person to be confirmed this year. David and Sarah were in the congregation and they were to be married the following Sunday. They regularly attend the service. Also Kevin and Denise, who were married there three years ago, who give out the books etc at the service and are both on Fryerning PCC. There were also two other couples, due to be married at the church this year. If ever anyone needed an example of life to be found in a church, it was here for everyone to see at Fryerning. Add to this in the congregation a number of people who have been at the church for many years, including Millie Parker, who talked to Sarah and David after the service and said she had been worshipping at St. Mary the Virgin for over eighty years. We are all working to ensure that in eighty years time people will still be worshipping in this ancient place as they have done for over 800 years. No-one knows how many Rectors there will have been in that period. Perhaps the Church magazine for May 2086 will feature this record of the service at Fryerning in the way Alan and Gill Beach search through our archives for articles.

At both churches much time and effort has been given by P.C.C.s to look at the church buildings to consider current and future needs. This is positive and the process is on-going, though I am sure that I speak for others as well as myself by saying that it will be good in both church buildings to have

achieved the results that we feel God desires.

At Ingatestone the PCC have undertaken an exciting new direction. We had an Away Day that was organised by Gill Hopkins as her Home Church project in her ordination training. We looked at the Marks of a Healthy Church, ranking how well we though Ingatestone Church was doing as part of the Away Day. Top of our list was 'does a few things and does them well'. This is encouraging as we do all work hard to undertake the ministry as well as we can. The Mark which came bottom was 'outward looking focus'. It was decided at the May PCC that each of the next seven meetings should begin with a one hour discussion around the Marks of a Healthy Church. We would look for specific action that we could take as a church to address the issues raised. They also requested a sermon on a Sunday each month in the period before the PCC meeting on the subject to be considered. Showing how the PCC are prepared to face difficult issues, the first mark to be considered was the one we considered we do least well. So you may have already heard the sermon entitled, 'What does it mean to be a church with an outward looking focus?' Copies of the document on the Seven Marks of a Healthy Church are available at the back of Ingatestone Church.

The PCC at Ingatestone also have a document produced by the Church of England about being a mission-shaped church. This is for background to our discussions, but it would be useful for anyone to consider it. It can be found on the Church of England website. For those without internet access I would be happy to supply a copy. It contains much that is food for thought. In particular, it reminds us that the mission of the church is God's mission. It is not our mission. We seek to do what God wants. This may be obvious, but it is the reality. When speaking to me people often say 'Your Church'. I usually correct them. It is not my church. Or the PCC's church. Or the congregation's church. Or the community's church. It is God's church in Ingatestone and in Fryerning. As I celebrate having been living here for five years, that thought needs to always on my mind. And on yours.

Yours in Christ,

*Patrick*