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Dear friends,

I would imagine that you find the sight and sound of our local Churches very comforting. You might live where you can hear the regular ringing of the bell at Ingatestone to sound the hours. You may walk along the High Street and give a casual glance to the Parish Church. As you drive to Billericay you might give a passing acknowledgement to Mountnessing or Buttsbury Parish Churches. If you are out a pleasant walk, you may stop for a moment to admire Margaretting Parish Church or Fryerning Parish Church. All very pleasant, comforting and re-assuring. It is good to see these ancient Parish Churches that have served their communities for hundreds of years. Even if you never actually enter then for a service, you still like the feeling that they are there.

Of course, the Church is not the building, but the people who come to worship. There would be little point in there being a school building in a community if there were no children to attend. We all do our bit to try and support the local shops, knowing that they provide a vital service for the community, but if there were no customers, they would soon close. It could easily be argued that people can worship God anywhere, and that is undeniably true. The early Christians soon found that they needed regular places to worship together. If you go to Capernaum you can visit the archaeological site of St. Peter's house. Latest research suggests that it was being used regularly for Christian gatherings as early as the third quarter of the first century A.D. Last month I stated how the early Celtic Christians felt that certain places were 'thin places' where something about the place made it easier to feel at peace with God and to share a sense of worship. People have always needed places to gather together to worship God and to ask for his blessing in relation to the birth of child, a marriage and a funeral. Our local communities are very fortunate to have churches that provide places for these gatherings. Places that due to their locations and immediate surrounding, allied with prayer having been said within them for hundreds of years, are themselves 'thin places'. It would be very sad if our generation were seen as that which did not value these special spiritual places as have previous generations. We benefit now from the faith, vision, commitment and support of people

in the past. Let us hope in a hundred years people will be able to say the same about us.

Pentecost is the season when we remember how a group of frightened disciples were given the gift of the Holy Spirit to be able to boldly proclaim the truth to the people. It was then they changed from being disciples to being apostles, leaders in their own right and able to talk openly and bravely about the teaching and life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is an important celebration in the life of the Church. This year, the Churches Together, the Anglican, Catholic, Elim and United Reformed Churches, will be combining for an open-air service on the area in front of Ingatestone Parish Church. This will be happening at 3.30. We know that if all those who regularly worship at all of the Churches Together Churches came along there would be hundreds of people gathered together. I suspect that people walking along Ingatestone High Street on a Sunday morning, having worshipped at the local supermarkets, are often oblivious of the fact that if you combined the numbers of worshippers in the Parish Church, the URC, the Elim Church and the Roman Catholic Church there would be hundreds of people. The Christian faith remains strong locally, and is as relevant to individual lives as it has always been. We all have to face the big questions in life and Christianity is bold enough to state that it can help you find the answers. That is the big claim made by Peter on that first Pentecost. If you read the incident in the Book of Acts you will see people thought he was drunk! Derision and ridicule have always been used by some against those who follow the faith. Some good Christian people are often scared to say too much about their faith to family, friends, work colleagues or school friends. It is very easy to feel belittled. That is why Christians need places where they can gather together. Places where they can feel strengthened by being with others who share their beliefs, strengthened by the activities that go through together, and strengthened by God. We can come together as local Christians on 31st of May this year to celebrate these realities and publicly show our faith to others. Bring something along to sit upon.

Sue Cruse has now finished her placement at Ingatestone and Fryerning. She will value her prayers in this period of finally finishing her college work and preparation, prior to her ordination. This is a very special time in Sue's life. It is a bold and public step, after which life will never be the same. She will have to get used to some very odd reactions to a clerical collar, even in our local villages! I am sure many of you will want to be at Chelmsford Cathedral on July 4th at 11pm for the ordination service. Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.

