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Dear friends,

As I write this letter, Easter is still fresh in my mind. It was wonderful to see, that as someone put in an e-mail to me, “these villages still remember the importance of Easter”. A congregation in three figures at the main service on Easter Day at Ingatestone and of nearly 70 at Fryerning, together with our Good Friday, Maundy Thursday and Palm Sunday services gave the framework to our celebrations. There was also this year, due to the new schedule of School holidays, the opportunity for the Church Junior School service in St. Mary the Virgin, Fryerning, to be in Holy week. This year we were also delighted to be invited into the Infants School. Here Sue and myself talked about Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and the children sang, “We have a king who rides a donkey” to the tune of *What shall we do with the drunken sailor*. Add to this a service for Willows Special Care Unit and an Easter Sunday Communion service at Ard Tulley, and you can see that Easter was well and truly celebrated. Contrast this with the results of a *Reader’s Digest* survey of 1001 randomly dialled people with questions on all kinds of religious matters. When asked, ‘Why do Christians celebrate Easter?’ only 47% responded with the word ‘resurrection’ or others with similar meaning. Before you think that many of those asked were from other faiths, responses relating to basic facts about Islam, Hinduism and Judaism were also poorly known. We live in a society where for many people their religion is to have no religion. How sad.

For the Christian knows that the faith gives meaning and purpose to life. As we move from Easter, through Ascension Day, to Pentecost, so we celebrate how we can have new purpose in life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I am delighted that, as last year, we will be celebrating Pentecost not only in our Churches on the morning of 15th of May, but also in the open air, on the grass at the front of St. Edmund and St.

Mary Parish Church. This will be a Churches Together service, led by our friends from the Elim Church. We need to be reminded that Christians can be criticised for appearing to be shut up in our churches. Of course we know this is not true, and our worship in church has the purpose of empowering us for our lives in the world, for doing good as God desires. But it is good to be visible. We are visible on Good Friday, with the walk of witness along the High Street. And we are visible on Pentecost.

We had large gatherings at the Spring Lunch for Fryerning Church at the Fryerning Parish Room and also at Ingatestone Hall for the concert and dinner for Ingatestone Parish Church. These events, very important in the on-going fund raising of both Churches, also demonstrate that as Christians we should come together and also reach out to others. Research clearly shows it is through personal contact with Christians that people are most likely to become interested in the faith and want to know more. That is why we all have a responsibility to be visible in our faith and realise we do not have the luxury of seeing it as a personal matter, of no interest to others. How do we know others are not interested? That friend, or acquaintance, or family member may be looking for someone to talk to about religious matters. You might never know unless you tentatively raise the question. They may be one of the 53% of the population ignorant of the reasons for the celebrations at Easter. If you do not tell them, who will?

The beginning of the new bereavement group is an important step forward in continuing to serve the community. One of my tasks is to be constantly aware of possibilities that the Holy Spirit is offering for us to develop the ministry of the Churches. We must never forget that the Church is the people, who meet in the buildings. The buildings exist to serve the people, not the other way around. At Fryerning we have the project that we believe will enhance the ministry based from that Church. At Ingatestone we also need to consider how our buildings could be developed. Churches have always engaged in these discussions if they are vibrant groups of people seeking to serve God.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.