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Dear friends,

Recently I went along to Fryerning Church in the middle of the afternoon to pick up a register from the vestry. There was a car parked by the gate and a couple were walking round the church. I smiled and said a greeting, but they really did not want to see me. She was clutching a copy of Simon Jenkin's book, 'England's Thousand Best Churches'. So I commented, 'I see you have the book'. She perked up, saying, 'Oh yes, I should think this book has done a lot of good, particularly for the smaller Churches'. I smiled, responding, 'Well it depends by what you mean by 'done a lot of good'. If you mean people travel a long way to find a Church, enjoy looking around it, but then put no money in the collection box, I do not see how it does any good. Churches need to be paid for.' She did not say anything.

You might consider this harsh, and showing a surprising lack of hospitality. Of course we are delighted to share the Church with anyone, but economic realities appear to sometimes pass people by in relation to Churches. It is as if sometimes people feel the buildings and the ministry are paid for by some mysterious force, or some great legacy from the past, or indeed anyone other than ourselves. At Fryerning we are trying to raise a very large sum of money to upgrade the Church and provide it with much needed modern facilities. Some of our older Church members have been shocked by the lack of support from some people in the community. Nobody lives in a home today without a toilet, but somehow it is supposed to still be acceptable that the Church building does not have one. If your heating system at home was erratic and your wiring needed attention, you would get it done. But somehow, this does not apply when it is the Church. Fryerning Church badly needs its facilities upgraded. If these were done, it would help provide what is needed to safeguard the future. That is not scare mongering. I can take you to places where Church buildings have closed.

Of course, the Churches are not independent units. They are part of the Church of England. The historic structures mean that everywhere is part of a parish and is the pastoral responsibility of a member of the clergy. It is not very long ago that Fryerning and Ingatestone each had

their own Rector. Many of you will know areas where one member of the clergy now covers six, seven or even more parishes. How can one person do it effectively? The Family Purse exists to support the ministry across the Diocese of Chelmsford, not just locally. Surely that is right. If you go twenty miles into London, with poverty, unemployment, homelessness, are we saying that because the ministry could never be paid for locally, it should be abandoned? I hope not. All this costs money. Both Fryerning and Ingatestone pay over £20,000 this year in Family Purse payments to the Diocese. Next year there is forecast a significant increase on this figure. In August this year, due to underpayment, the Diocese had to take out a loan to pay the clergy. This cannot continue. If the Diocese goes bankrupt we would be in uncharted waters. Loss of clergy posts and Church closure would be inevitable consequences. This is not pessimism, this is reality. We have to face hard truths. The Church of England teaches that 10% of income and wealth, as is clearly stated in the Bible, is our minimum due to God for all he has done for us. 5% to the local Church and 5% to charities of your choice. In the Brentwood deanery, our area, the average given is less than 3%.

The time of Remembrance is when we acknowledge the great sacrifice of others in the past. I have been actively supporting the campaign for a new and prominent War Memorial in Ingatestone. These things take time, hopefully by next November it will be in place. We live in a society obsessed with 'now'. When I watch a quiz programme on the television, I am always conscious of how little people know about the Bible and Christianity. They also appear to know little about the past. We write 04 on our cheques as if the world is just four years old. It was in Cambodia in the 1970s that the calendar was started again and the past was officially obliterated. It is as if that which Pol Pot tried there, we have succeeded with here. Our debts to the past are conveniently erased. Our new War Memorial will not allow the past to be forgotten.

Our historic Churches are great monuments to the past and the commitment of our ancestors in the faith. They were statements made to us about how important they felt the faith to be in their lives. Both of our Churches are places that are alive, not museums. God is at work through them, reaching out to demonstrate his timeless love. We will all stand before Him one day to justify how we lived. The use of the resources he has given us is a theme running throughout the Bible. Can any of us feel it is OK to simply ignore that reality? Look at your own life and see all God has given you. Then ask the question, what do I give Him? Yours in Christ, *Patrick*