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Dear friends,

It is at times of difficulty that we really see the value and strength of our faith. We can know the love and compassion of God to help us through the dark times. One of the 21st century myths of Christianity is that if we give our lives to God, there will be no dark times. I know people in our villages who, when personal difficulties of illness to themselves and unexpected death to a loved one happened, they abandoned coming to church because they thought God had abandoned them, or that these incidences showed God simply did not exist. Somehow they had this idea of a deal – I believe in God, nothing horrible will happen to me or those I love. It really does not take much knowledge of Christianity or of those who have given their lives to God to see how this is a false idea. The murder of Brother Roger of Taize during the summer sadly makes this point all too clearly. God did not abandon him, nor does he abandon us when dark things happen. Through the death of Jesus, we know that God has personally experienced the sadness and difficulties that are part of human life. Jesus is recorded as crying at the death of a friend. It is in the dark times of human life, which we all experience, that the power of God to sustain us is very real.

This month sees the confirmation service on Wednesday 12th at St. Giles, Mountnessing at 7.30. These are always wonderful services and I know that Bishop Laurie sees taking confirmation services as a real privilege. We have three adult candidates who worship regularly at Fryerning, two who worship regularly at Ingatestone and four young people who worship at Ingatestone, three of whom are in the choir. Those people who say that the Church is dying in our villages, and I expect there are some who say that who never go themselves, should take note of these figures. Anyone publicly giving their life to God in this way is standing out against modern culture. Long gone are the days when being confirmed was a rite of passage for a teenager. The world we live in derides faith of any kind. Not only will our young candidates find it hard, but I know that those of more

mature years have had negative comments said to them. Even in our villages the cynicism of modern life is to be found. Pray for our candidates, both for the service at Mountnessing and for the years ahead. With the courses and the service, they have taken significant steps in their Christian journeys, but they still have far to go.

In August I went for a trip of seven days based in Durham. It was a wonderful mixture of a retreat and a holiday. Almost every day we visited a religious site associated with Anglo Saxon saints, including Whitby and Lindisfarne. Durham Cathedral was just a short walk from where I stayed, so early morning communion and evensong were possible most days. I am looking into the possibility of trying to organise to take a group next July to have the same experiences. If you feel you would be interested, please let me know. We would need 30 people to make it viable. Family and friends would be welcome.

During my time in Durham, I found new friends in two groups of Americans who were on the trip. Many of us fly away from our beautiful country for holidays, whilst others come here from all over the world. The north east of England is gorgeous, yet having spoken to many people about the trip, they say they have never been. For many of these Americans, it was their first trip to England, with their priority to go to Durham.

My time away this year meant that I was unable to visit the Brownie camp, or be involved with CHIPS. I hope we all realise we are blessed in our villages to have people like Janet and Sue, and their helpers, to run voluntary activities that are such a benefit to the children of the village. This extends to the other Brownie group, the Guides and Rangers, the Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, the Sunday Schools and other voluntary groups. All of these activities, so beneficial to the children, would not happen without the dedication of so many people. It is Christianity in action to be helping and caring for others.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.