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Dear friends,

During the Ingatestone lectures in July we had two very interesting pieces of news. Chris Bard, who presents the breakfast show on Sunday mornings from 6 a.m. on BBC Essex, announced that the programme was being extended from one hour to three hours. If you have never listened, you have missed a treat, as this entertaining programme looks to provide religious news for the country. Both Frances and myself have been interviewed on the programme. Olave Snelling, from Premier Radio announced that Premier would soon be available via Freeview. I know quite a lot of people in the villages listen to Premier on Medium Wave, but the signal is poor. On Freeview it will be digitally clear. Premier is a Christian owned and run station that at Easter celebrated nine years of broadcasting.

Both these pieces of news demonstrate an increased interest in the things of God. The BBC would not be extending the programme Chris produces and presents if there were not a demand. Premier Radio would not be expanding without the funds to do so. Faith gives us a sense of belonging, as well as meaning and purpose to our all too short lives. As human beings we need a sense of belonging. We can all see that demonstrated very clearly by the way people follow football teams. Team shirts, scarves, photos etc give a sense of belonging. Visiting the home ground with others all wearing the same colours is about belonging. Visiting an away ground, where the majority wear another colour, strengthens the sense of belonging among the away supporters and gives a mutual sense of belonging together. I have friends who live in north London who are Greeks. During this summer's European football championships they wore their Greek colours with renewed pride. After the final they were up all night. In Greece, the Orthodox Church is also at the heart of the sense of belonging. The purpose of the Flower Festival at Ingatestone was also about showing that we have a sense of belonging in this village. If someone says 'Ingatestone' the first image that comes into our mind is the magnificent Tudor tower. It is a symbol of our collective belonging. We are people of the village, willing to welcome others. We should also remember why the tower was built and why the church continues as a flourishing centre for the things of God. It

does not just speak of the past. It also speaks of now and of the future. God is the God of the past, present and future. It was Mark Twain who said on reading his own obituary, 'reports of my death are greatly exaggerated'. So it is of interest in the things of God, those things which can provide us with a true and deep sense of belonging.

We are continually looking to respond to the needs and desires of people. When Antonia Johnson was born and then baptised, her mother Vicky looked for a group to join of mothers with babies. As many of you will know, there is a lack of such provision in the village. Rather than just bemoaning this reality, Vicky and some friends have looked to do something about it. The result is EMUs, St. Edmund and Mary under 5s, which meets on Friday mornings in the parish Rooms. This is an exciting new development. I have baptised many children since June 2001 and now we have a group where the children can be brought. God will show us how this will develop. If you would like to know more, talk to Vicky, whose phone number is at the back of this magazine.

We are also looking to setup a group to meet in the school library on Monday afternoons from 2, with the support of Mr. Manterfield. We have many mothers who now attend church, particularly on the first Sunday of the month. It is appropriate that we offer time and resources to help them learn a little more of the things of God. The Y course has been developed to gently help this kind of understanding. In the school library, with the help of cakes, chocolates, tea and coffee, we will be thinking about the things of God in a relaxed and friendly way. I am sure it will be enjoyable. We look to start on the 23rd of September. If you would like to be part of this group, talk to Maureen Barnett, Sue Cruse or myself.

Last year the church had nearly 100 people for the Saturday afternoon harvest service featuring the London Emmanuel Choir. This was one of their last engagements before the world-famous choir disbanded. Some of the members formed a choir called Sing Immanuel. We welcome them as part of the Ingatestone harvest celebrations. They were very keen to come back. Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> of October at 3 p.m. will see them with us. The weekend includes the school harvest service, a harvest supper and the Sunday morning family service.

Both Chris Bard and Olave Snelling sensed that the things of God were of interest to the people of Ingatestone. May these things give us a meaningful and lasting sense of identity.

*Yours in Christ, Patrick*

