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Dear friends,

I hope you find reading this edition of the Towers interesting and informative. A church magazine in some form for Ingatestone has been produced for over one hundred years. Of course there has been a church in the village for over nine hundred years. The north wall of St. Edmund and St. Mary Parish Church dates from 1080 and it has always been rumoured that the church stands on the footprint of a Saxon church. Parts of St. Mary the Virgin, Fryerning, date from the 11th century. The ancient buildings speak of our need to acknowledge there is more to life than the every day. Theologians speak of us all having 'a God shaped hole' in our hearts and that we are always searching. We try to fill the hole with all kinds of alternatives but are dissatisfied until we will that hole with the love of God. I know that until my own personal conversion through illness nineteen years ago I tried to fill the hole with the usual alternatives; being a workaholic, material aspirations, being a success in the eyes of others etc. It took until lying in a hospital bed with an emergency operation being planned and the belief that I was about to die before I realised only God could fill a God shaped hole. Thankfully not everyone needs something quite so dramatic!

It is very appropriate when we have a baptism service to give a candle to the candidate. We now baptise or Christen (it means the same) many babies and young children, but the oldest person I have baptised was aged seventy three! The world is a dark place and sadly it would appear to be getting darker. The candle is like a torch, symbolic of what is called 'the light of Christ'. This, we believe, to be the teachings of Jesus which guide us in how to live life. These teachings can help to guide us through the darkness. We also give a Youth Bible to every leaver from the Church of England Junior School. This is to provide them with a tool to help guide through the darkness of life. Of course it is for them to decide personally whether they

choose to do this. That is why God gave us all free will, it is up to us to choose. God can help us all to become the best possible version of ourselves.

Despite there now being many alternative venues, many people choose to have their wedding in either of the two Church of England Parish Churches. Literally thousands of couples have been married in these churches over the centuries. Where could there be better to make a public statement of mutual love? They are the appropriate places to ask for God's blessing on a future life together.

The churches are also the most fitting place to give thanks for a life and to hold a funeral. This can be done before a burial at Fryerning or a cremation. Or a memorial service can be held. Every life has within it good and hard times, a fact noted in the marriage service. That is the reality of human life. Faith is not about praying that these difficulties do not happen. Rather it is about getting the strength to deal with all that does happen. At the end of every life, even if it is much shorter than everyone would have hoped, there is still much for which to give thanks.

I am delighted that more and more people are regularly attending church locally. That is certainly not the message that the media portrays, but it is true. Increasingly people are finding that being part of a regular worshipping and praying community helps to give meaning and purpose to their lives. As the Church of England Parish Churches we play a full part in ecumenical work with our fellow Christians in Churches Together. We also see our wider responsibilities to the local community and beyond.

My prayer for you as you read this magazine is that you will hear God's still small voice encouraging you to re-examine your life and values. He might even be suggesting to you that you go to church! All the village churches across the denominations would welcome you. We would be delighted to see you at the Church of England Churches. **30th of September is Back to Church Sunday.** It would be great to see you then.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*