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Dear friends,

My sabbatical was a great gift of time and opportunities.. I have had time to reflect on the love of God, and service to Him and His people. There have been opportunities to meet with some inspiring people. Also there has been the opportunity to undertake some extra-ordinary experiences. My full report for the Diocese is available in this magazine. Having a sabbatical was not originally my own idea, but was suggested to me by senior clergy in the Diocese. I thank them for encouraging me. Thanks also go to everyone in the parishes who have been very positive about the idea. I am only too aware of how my being away impacted on others. To the wardens and all members of the PCCs, thank you. Thanks are also due to Derek, Miranda and others, including the Bishop of Chelmsford, who took services that I would normally have taken. However, special thanks go to Sue. When a sabbatical is being organised, a plan has to be produced to show how activities will be covered. My plan had Sue Cruse written throughout it. I am so blessed to have Sue as a colleague. She has always undertaken far more for our parishes than she should. Thank you Sue.

One of our first tasks once I was back was to talk with Sue about her future. As many of you will be aware, Sue has now finished the period of her curacy. Of course we all know in life that no-ones training and education is ever completed. The phrase 'life-long-learning' would be a suitable metaphor for the Christian experience. Sue will now become an Associate Minister. This means that she has a more senior role, both with us and in wider contexts. There will be specific areas of the ministry of the benefice which will be under her guidance. She will also continue in her role as Chaplain with the North Thames Ministerial Training Course. Once Sue's working agreement has been ratified by Bishop Laurie, we can tell you more. We will also be planning to have a special service to licence Sue in this new position.

It was fantastic how positive things continued to happen and develop while I was away. I have always said that we simply undertake God's work and He will show us what to do and make totally unexpected things happen. Sue Elliot Jones has moved into the parish. She was a Reader in her previous parish. This is another totally unexpected and amazing development. Sue has worshipped regularly with us at Ingatestone and is very keen to play her part.. As she is new to the Diocese we have to wait six months for Sue to be fully involved. She has already read the lesson and lead intercessions. She is also learning from Sue Cruse and me about leading funerals and the whole process of working with the bereaved. I hope you get to meet her very soon.

In September we have *Back to Church Sunday*. This initiative is now spread around the country from the start in Manchester Diocese. It the opportunity to invite to a church service those who you know who used to be regularly involved. It is on the 28th of September. About fifteen hundred years ago a holy man was asked why someone who considered they were a Christian needed to go to church. The holy man said nothing. He walked across to the fire, picked up some tongs and placed a red hot coal on the floor. The holy man and the man with him both watched the coal as it became cold. When it was completely cold the holy man picked it up with his hand and then placed it back in the fire. They watched how it glowed and became warm again. He said nothing to the enquirer, allowing him to realise the point being made. As Christians, we need others to keep us warm in our faith. One of our confirmation candidates this year told me of how those with whom she worked did not understand about confirmation and made fun of her in a cruel way. That is the world in which we live. Christians need each other, to talk and worship together and strengthening through teaching.

Christians I worshipped with in Israel understood very clearly the need for community with other Christians. Perhaps the hostility around you may not be quite so obvious. Or perhaps it is.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*