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Dear friends,

Recently our church councils have been considering how we can let more people know about all that happens in and through the churches. We have considered the question, 'Are we an outward-facing church?' We believe that we are open and friendly, always willing to welcome people. If that answer surprises you, that is because the definition of 'the church' is the people. Ingatestone and Fryerning is clearly a geographic area, but if suddenly all the people were gone it would be a ghost town. It would be an empty shell. The villages are the people who give the place life and a sense of community. The same is true of the church. Yes we have two ancient buildings. But without the people they would be empty shells. If no-one came to worship services, if no-one wanted baptism, wedding or funeral services in them, what would they be? Museum pieces? Ripe for being made redundant? Available for conversion to other uses? Our buildings exist to be places where people can worship God, learn more about Him and experience his presence, and undertake significant events in the journey of life. But without the people - 'the church' - they are lacking a purpose.

So do you consider yourself to be part of the church? The Church of England has always taken the view that by living in the parish you are part of the church. The parish system was brought into place so that every community had a Parish Church, ideally walking distance from where people lived. This is why around the country there are so many Church of England Churches in what today looks like very close proximity to each other. This historical legacy of course brings difficulties with it in the modern world. I am sure you know of places where the Church of England has found it simply impossible to sustain the buildings. There is a strange idea that historic church buildings are funded by the government. They are not. All funding for a Church of England church has to come from the local people, 'the church'. You may say that there are grants available to help. This may be true, but our experience in relation to the upgrading work so desperately needed at St. Mary's Fryerning is that it is almost impossible to obtain. Many bodies are reticent to give money to buildings with religious purposes. Any development projects need to be funded by those who value the church buildings. Do you value our local church buildings?

The same is true of the ministry. Someone in the village told me that as I was the Rector in "the State Church" my stipend was paid for from their taxes! And they resented it!! Where do these ideas come from? The Church of England has a Parish Share system where congregations pay towards the cost of the ministry, clergy pensions and wider church structures. **The official terminology is 'Parish Share'**. In wealthier areas, parishes pay at a higher level, in order to help subsidise the ministry in poorer areas. If the Church of England is to continue its presence in each community, this is surely fair. Both of our parishes paid well over £20,000 in 2005, **meeting their parish share in full, as set by the Diocese**. This generosity is appreciated, but not taken for granted. And we

struggle locally to pay it. Many people who do contribute locally are on fixed incomes. Thousands of people live in Ingatestone and hundreds in Fryerning. Our treasurers, Martin Taylor for Ingatestone and Roy Garnham for Fryerning, could tell you how many people pay regular Gift Aided contributions. The answers might surprise you.

Please do not read this as the Church of England being always obsessed with money. I wanted everyone to understand how the system works, as there are so many misconceptions.

I am delighted to say that our Parish Churches - your parish Churches - are still places where people come to worship God and undertake all the activities historically associated with the ministry.

Worship.

We believe that God can be worshipped in all kinds of styles. The Book of Common Prayer is at the foundation of the identity of the Church of England. That is why we continue to hold many services across the two churches that use this prayer book. However, we recognise that for many people there needs to be a more modern style in order for them to feel they can worship. That is why we also offer modern services using the Common Worship Prayer Book. We also offer a variety of services from within these two styles. I know it can be confusing for those who do not attend regularly, but each week at both churches really is different.

A particular emphasis is also placed on children. At Ingatestone we hold a family service with communion on the first Sunday of the month, at which we regularly welcome our local Brownies. The fourth Sunday in the month is a family Service at Fryerning, where there **is** a regular group of children who have been baptised at the church in recent years. Age appropriate Sunday Club groups are held on the second and third Sundays each month at Ingatestone ***during part of the time of the main service**, for children aged from three to teenagers.

*(*this sounds a bit confusing and I'm not sure if it is needed, especially if Christine is going to do a piece on the Sunday Club, which I assume would give all the details.)*

We are continually looking to improve and develop our worship.

Baptisms.

As churches we value work with children. Jesus spoke of how we can learn from the example of how a small child is dependant on their parents as to how we can be dependant on God. In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of people having their children baptised, the correct terminology for Christening. The Church of England has always seen this as important. Three Godparents are needed, two the same sex as the child. Together with the parents, they make Christian promises about the upbringing of the child.

Weddings.

How could anyone born or brought up in our villages want to be married anywhere else? Together with my colleague, Revd. Sue Cruse, we are willing to discuss holding church weddings for those who live in the village or worship regularly at the churches. The faith is about new starts and new beginnings. We follow the Church of England guidelines on the re-marriage of those who are divorced. Providing they meet either of the above criteria, were not involved in the break-up of the new partner's previous relationship and that everything has been settled amicably, we are happy to undertake the service. We will also discuss a blessing service after a civil marriage. Marriage is something to be celebrated and a special service to commemorate a significant anniversary is a wonderful occasion.

Funerals.

The cemetery at Fryerning exists to serve the local community and is administered and maintained by the Parish Council. We are happy to organise services in either church for those from the local community. Services can also be held prior to a **cremation** at the crematorium or as a memorial service later. We work closely with all the local undertakers. In conjunction with the local CO-OP funeral directors we have a bereavement group.

Involvement with other churches.

Our local Churches Together is very strong. The role of chairman rotates among the ministers from the Catholic, Elim, **United Reformed Church** and ourselves. We hold a number of services together throughout the year. The next will be on New Year's Eve at St. Edmund and St. Mary Parish Church. We also hold a very successful Lent course each year and in recent years the local ministers have produced a joint booklet of Bible reflections, which has been widely acclaimed. All the member churches support Fair Trade.

Overseas links.

The Revd Sue Cruse was part of a Diocesan group that went to Kenya earlier this year. As a follow up to this trip and the presentations given by Sue, we are exploring ways of developing links with a Kenyan theological college. For a second year our harvest collection at Ingatestone Parish Church has been focussed on Harvest for the Hungry, an Essex based charity that send food items to the poorest regions of Bulgaria and other parts of eastern Europe. With our encouragement, the harvest collections in both the Infant and Church Junior School have been for this charity.

Serving the local community.

All of our ministry aims to serve the local community. We have strong links with the Infants School and the Anglo-European School. The Junior School is a Church School,

with the church locally providing a high percentage of the governors. Our EMUs under 5s group is very successful. We have a Bible reading group that meets regularly. Diana Jarvis, a trained independent counsellor works out of the Ingatestone vestry. Of course Sue and I are happy to talk with anyone. We visit Ardtully to regularly take services. The church provides members of the local Nursing Trust. Partnership with other local organisations has led to a number of developments, most notably the new War Memorial with Ingatestone Rotary Club. We also organise many community events, like the Fryerning Fathers' day BBQ and the recent Ingatestone Rug Opera concert and meal at Ingatestone Hall.

Serving God and the local community.

Our aim, as that of the Church of England has always historically been, is to help people to know the power of God in their lives. The reality is that God is always at work. Five worshippers from Ingatestone church and one from Fryerning church were confirmed in the faith by Bishop Laurie on October 10th along with five from our neighbouring benefice. We have already booked the service for next year, believing there will others called by God.

Hopefully this has shown you that our churches are active in serving God and the people of our villages. Our churches are people motivated, by their love of God and knowledge of God's desire for them through salvation in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, to be the best people they can and to express this through worship and service. We also desire to keep our church buildings as places that can continue the practice of being available to everyone. They are the oldest buildings in our villages and have been the responsibility of each generation to upkeep and develop. They are your buildings. We are your church.

Yours in Christ,
Patrick.