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Dear friends,

How well do you know some people that you often see? The answer is probably, "Not very well". As a people, the English have often been considered as those who guard their privacy, "An Englishman's home is his castle". Yet we all need friends and acquaintances to enable life to have richness. One of the saddest comments ever made to me was some years ago when someone said, "Explain to me about friends, because I have never had any". This comment from a woman in her late 50s was a sad comment on her life. Further conversation showed that she did not trust other people and was afraid of people gossiping about her and her husband. So consequently she had shut the doors of her life to others.

St. Paul is very clear that we should not gossip about each other. One of the main stays of our media is gossip about the so-called rich and famous. Sitting with friends watching a programme about the winners of The X Factor, it is quite clear how for our media celebrity has become a constant obsession, with last year's celebrity being a has-been and a five years ago celebrity being totally forgotten. Of course there can be an unhealthy interest in the lives of other, but there can also be a genuine desire to help and share the life of others. Christians are called to be part of a caring community, which is one of the roles of the church. We are meant to know the person next to us in the pew so that we can pray meaningfully about them. This is also something emphasised by St. Paul. Christians are called to be a praying community; praying for the world and for each other.

It concerned me earlier this year when two people who each play a very significant role in our churches became very unwell and we asked everyone across the churches to pray for them. In both churches people knew the name of the person from the other church and their role, but nothing else. For Sue Cruse, Sue Elliott-Jones and myself, dealing with people from both churches, it is very easy to miss this reality that people do not

know each other. We took a small step towards addressing this by having a garden party for the two P.C.C.s in the summer. I heard someone say, "It is good to put a face to a name", prior to a fifteen minute conversation. At Ingatestone church we will be looking to organise dinners that will be fund-raising, but also give people the opportunity to get to know each other. Our Wednesday evening group, where anyone can come and talk about the previous Sunday sermon, has helped greatly to develop friendship. The same was true amongst those of us who went together with a bigger group to the Passion Play in Oberammagau. Remember, Jesus called his followers friends. If we can call him friend, then we should be able to call each other friends.

Praying for those who are unwell in spirit, mind or body has become an important part of our ministry. The confidential prayer chain receives a number of requests. Personally I get quite a lot of e-mails asking me to remember people in prayer, often from people who are far from regular at church. After an Away Day with the Ingatestone P.C.C. we decided to begin a regular healing service in church. This will be on the first Sunday of the month at 6 p.m., starting this month. It will be in the context of a communion service, but that should not stop anyone who does not receive from coming. At our regular communion services at Ingatestone, a high percentage of people come for a blessing. The service will include the opportunity for anointing with oil, which is an ancient Christian practice and one Bishop Laurie used with the candidates at the Confirmation Service. At our healing service we will use the words, *I anoint you in the name of God who gives you life. Receive Christ's forgiveness, healing and love.* The service will also offer the Laying on of Hands. This will be just a gentle touch on the shoulder or head, the same as we use in a blessing, with the words, *In the name of Christ and trusting in his might alone, receive Christ's healing touch to make you whole. May Christ bring you wholeness of body, mind and spirit, deliver you from every evil and bring you peace.* As you can see, these words point to the healing power of Christ. This is very mainstream in the Christian faith and many churches, including the Cathedrals, have regular healing services. Ours will have a very quiet and

reflective atmosphere, and I do pray that many people will feel called to attend.

The reality is that as a Christian minister I have been called over the years to pray regularly for healing with many people. Of course much has been confidential, and it would be wrong to give chapter and verse of instances. I have seen many people approach death with a calmness and assurance that I would say showed a healing of their mind and spirit. The reality that none of us is happy to consider is that we know our bodies are finite and will eventually no longer function. Healing for our bodies will eventually reach a point where no more is possible. Does that reality not point profoundly for us to have healing of our minds and spirits so, in the words from the healing service prayers, we can *receive Christ's healing and love*? This will then bring with it a deep and real sense of peace. Seen in this way, healing is a natural and real part of all that Christ wants to offer to those who believe in him.

One of the unexpected joys of preparing confirmation candidates this year has been sitting together and just reading the Bible and reflecting on all that we have read. I am amazed how many of us will spend hours reading the latest thriller from our favourite author, yet not read the Bible. Yet I have also discovered in the honesty of our times together, that of course sometimes the message can be difficult to fully understand. One of the great privileges of my theological training being residential was that we simply sat around reading and discussing the Bible as part of our normal routine. I have been really happy to do this again this year and I personally would like to do it some more. It would good to find a group of people, no more than five, who could commit to regularly meet together to begin reading the Bible. Once we knew who we were, we could work out the details. If you would like to do this, please be in touch.

Jesus said that he came to give us life in all its fullness. There is so much that he wants to give to us. We are the ones who put up barriers and the world often appears to conspire against us. Let us look to allowing Jesus to give us all he desires.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*