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Dear friends,

It is very good once again to be able to have The Towers delivered to every household in Ingatestone and Fryerning. We have a regular print run of nearly five hundred, but it is good to be able to reach out to the whole community. Our ancient parish churches, both over nine hundred years old, have been physical representations of God's presence with us for all that time. Historically they have been the place where local people have come to celebrate important realities of life. The thanksgiving we feel for the miracle that is the birth of any child. The joy shared by family and friends for a couple publicly demonstrating their love for each other through a wedding service. The buildings in which to give thanks for the life of an individual prior to their burial or cremation.

The churches have also been the places to celebrate important community activities. The places to remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in time of war. We know the bells were rung in both churches to make the ends of both World Wars and I suspect many other national conflicts and celebrations, such as numerous coronations. The harvest would have been of very great local significance and services would have held to celebrate God's provision. There have always been major celebrations at Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas and other church festivals. Our church buildings have featured in the lives of hundreds of thousands of local people through the centuries.

The great joy of church buildings such as ours is that they not only speak of the great history of the importance of faith in God to the people of our communities in the past. They speak silently of the continuing relevance today, the reality of future significance to those who are now young and future generations. I recently took a wedding at Fryerning church for a couple where the groom had been at the Anglo-European School and had visited the church as a pupil and had decided then that one day he wanted to be married in the church. Numerous

people like to tell me about their baptism at the church as an infant, or their parent's weddings, or grandparent's weddings. I am delighted that we live in a community where so many people have pictures of their local church on the wall.

Our churches continue, through regular worship, to invite people to consider the importance of faith in Jesus to understanding life. The confirmation service on 2nd of September again gives the opportunity for people to publicly show a new and distinct depth of faith and a desire to continue to grow in love and service of God and other people. For those at an earlier stage of their faith journey, with other local churches we run an Alpha Course based at the United Reform Church.

We would hope that our churches are always places that help people to be in contact with the really important realities of life and where people can be truly real before each other and God. We are all bereaved people. Who of us does not know the pain of the loss of a loved one? That is why we run a bereavement support group in conjunction with the CO-OP Funeral directors on the first Tuesday morning of each month in the Parish Room, 10.30-12 noon. It is also why Bennetts will be running a Grief Journey course also at the Parish Rooms, 6 – 7.30 starting on 23rd of September. Do consider how this course could help you.

We also serve our younger community through the Church Junior School and welcoming children to our services and the Uniformed organisations to our Family services. At Ingatestone we have Sunday Club activities on the 2nd and 3rd Sundays each month and crèche facilities always available.

On a recent school class visit, one of the eight year old boys asked, "Why do we have churches?" Rather than answering myself, I asked his classmates to answer. One child said, "So that when we are so busy, we can have somewhere to help us remember all about God, and all he does for us and we can do for him". "Yes!" I replied and I suspect the angels applauded.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*