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Dear friends,

We were all shocked by the images of the earthquake and the tsunami that we saw on Boxing Day. How true it is that we live today in a 'global village'. The fact that so many people were killed, including those who were tourists from such a large number of countries, has just brought home our inter-dependence. At the Churches Together service on New Year's Eve the entire collection has been sent to the appeal. We cannot pretend that such an event has not happened. As Christians we can respond in two particular ways. We can be generous with our giving. We know that all the resources we have are given to us by God, and we are merely custodians. God gives us all our good abilities and expects us to develop them to full capacity. If this has meant that we have done well materially, again it is to God we should look with thanks. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman.

We can also pray. We can pray for the survivors. Looking at the devastation it is difficult to imagine how the communities will ever be rebuilt. But the physical scars of the landscape are matched by the mental scars of those who have lost family and friends. The pain here may never heal. We can also pray for those engaged in the relief activities. Being surrounded by so much destruction and despair is inevitably difficult and dispiriting. Someone described to me knowing that people are praying for you is like the encouragement a tired runner receives from the crowd at the London Marathon. If they want to give up, the crowd just keeps them going. We are part of that crowd, urging on those physically involved, doing what they can to help.

We live in beautiful villages, and we know how lucky we are to do so. We also live in a global village, with wide responsibilities to our fellow men, women and children.

Our sense of shock was then overwhelmed by the tragedy involving Geoffrey and Fleur Bacon. Even as I write this there is a sense of unreality about the whole incident. They were dear, sweet people with a heart of gold. They would do anything for anyone. Only a few days before, both my mother and I had been unwell with the fluey cold that so many people have been suffering from. It was Fleur who offered to go and get the shopping. Next day she appeared with some home-made soup and then Geoffrey was on the doorstep asking what else needed to be done. This is the kind of people that they were. Fryerning Church and indeed the whole community have lost two of its most valuable members.

It is the most natural question to ask, "Why did it happen?" and to follow this up quickly with, "How could God let it happen?" Jesus was himself asked the same question about a tower that had fallen down in Jerusalem and killed many people. He was asked if God was punishing the people. To that his response was, of course not. His answer was that we live in the kind of world where this sort of thing happens. The question is not "How could God let it happen?" but "How can God help us when a terrible thing does happen?"

That is our appropriate response to both the tragedy so far away and the tragedy here in our own community. God will give us the strength to be able to deal with our local tragedy. We need to not just pray for those far away, but also at this time to pray for the family of Geoffrey and Fleur and also for ourselves. It is times like this that a real sense of community, of mutual caring and support, can be felt.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*.