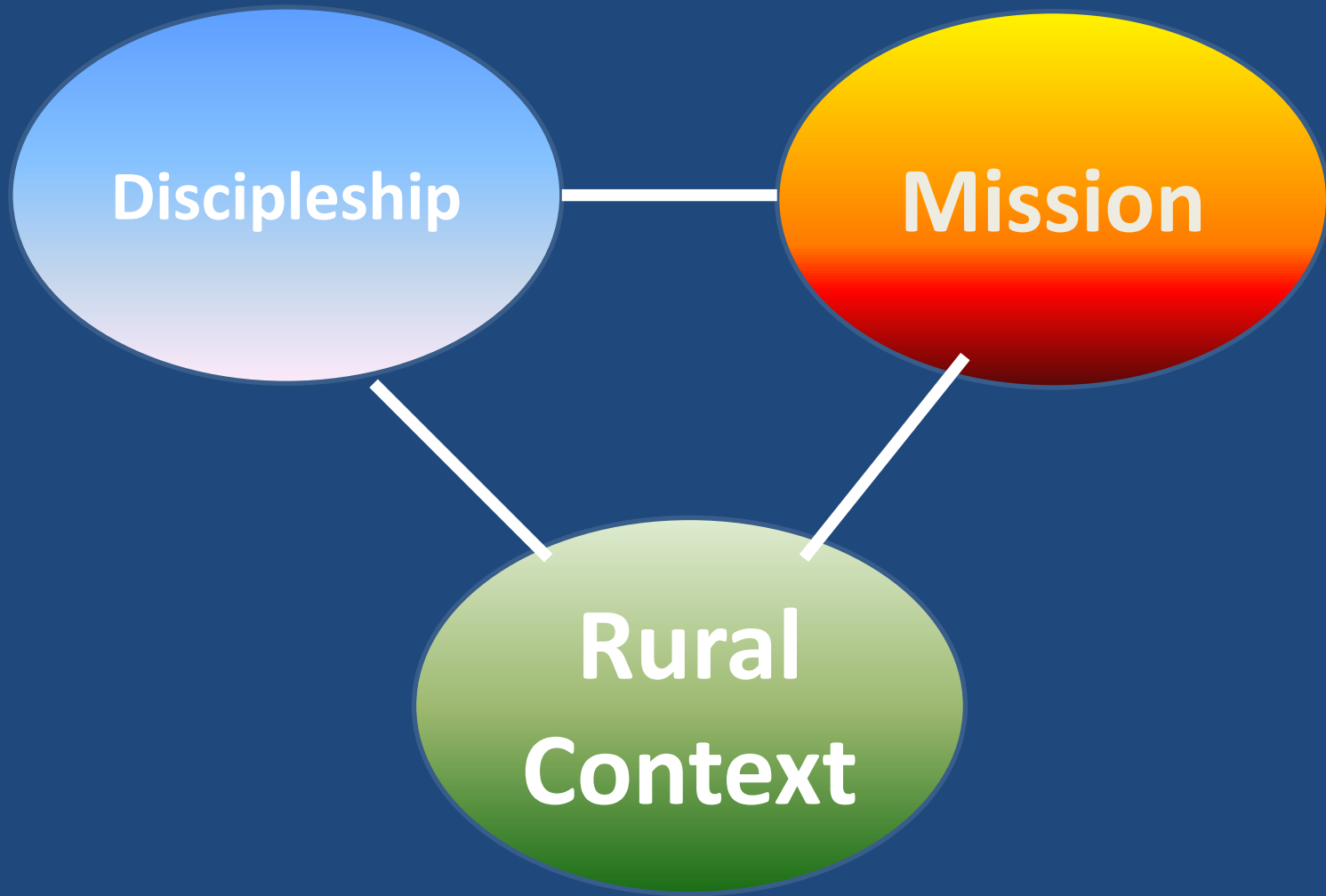


# Mission and Discipleship in a rural context

Diocese of Oxford

19<sup>th</sup> November 2011



# Part 1

## What does "rural" mean today?



Most of the land area of  
the UK is rural.

**Approximately 90%.**

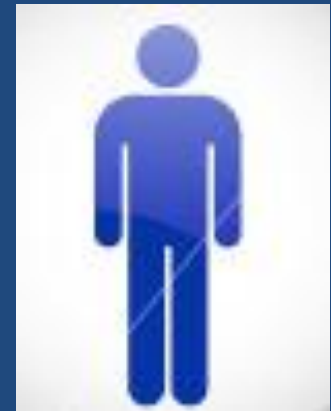


**Rural Britain:**

**Home to 10,000,000 people**



# One in Six People live in the rural areas



Rural Britain:

Probably

Over 20,000 settlements



# Population

- Approximately 10.4% of Britain's population live in discrete communities of 1000 or less.
- A further 1.4% live in communities between 1,000 to 2,000
- A further 5% live in communities from 2,000 to 5,000
- Rural population is growing

*Data Source: Consultation with Office for National Statistics*

# Small and scattered



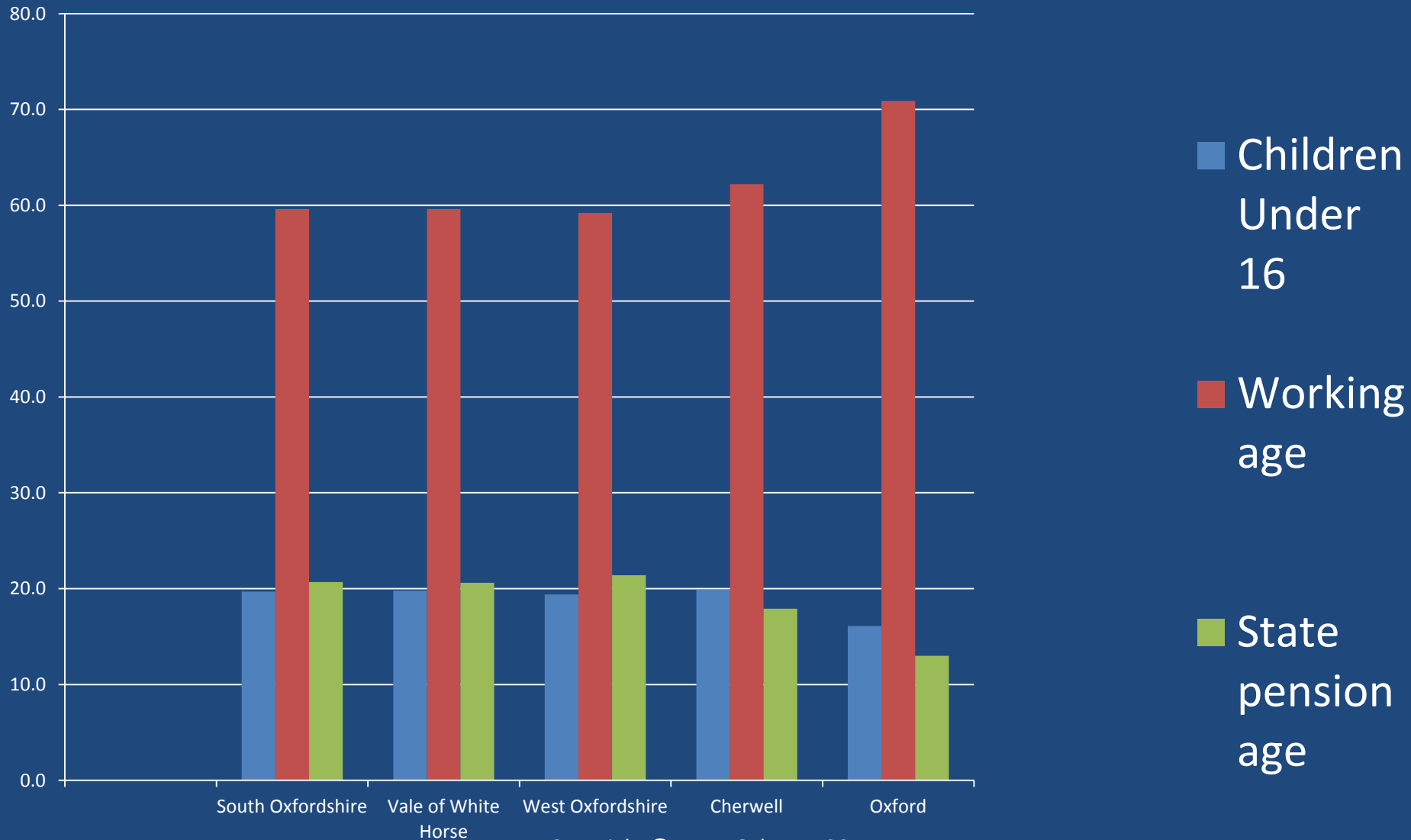
# In Oxfordshire

- 41% of the population live in rural settlements with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.
- Over the past 100 years the county population has increased five-fold.
- 9 towns with more than 10,000
- 5 towns between 5,001 and 10,000
- More than half the county population are officially rural

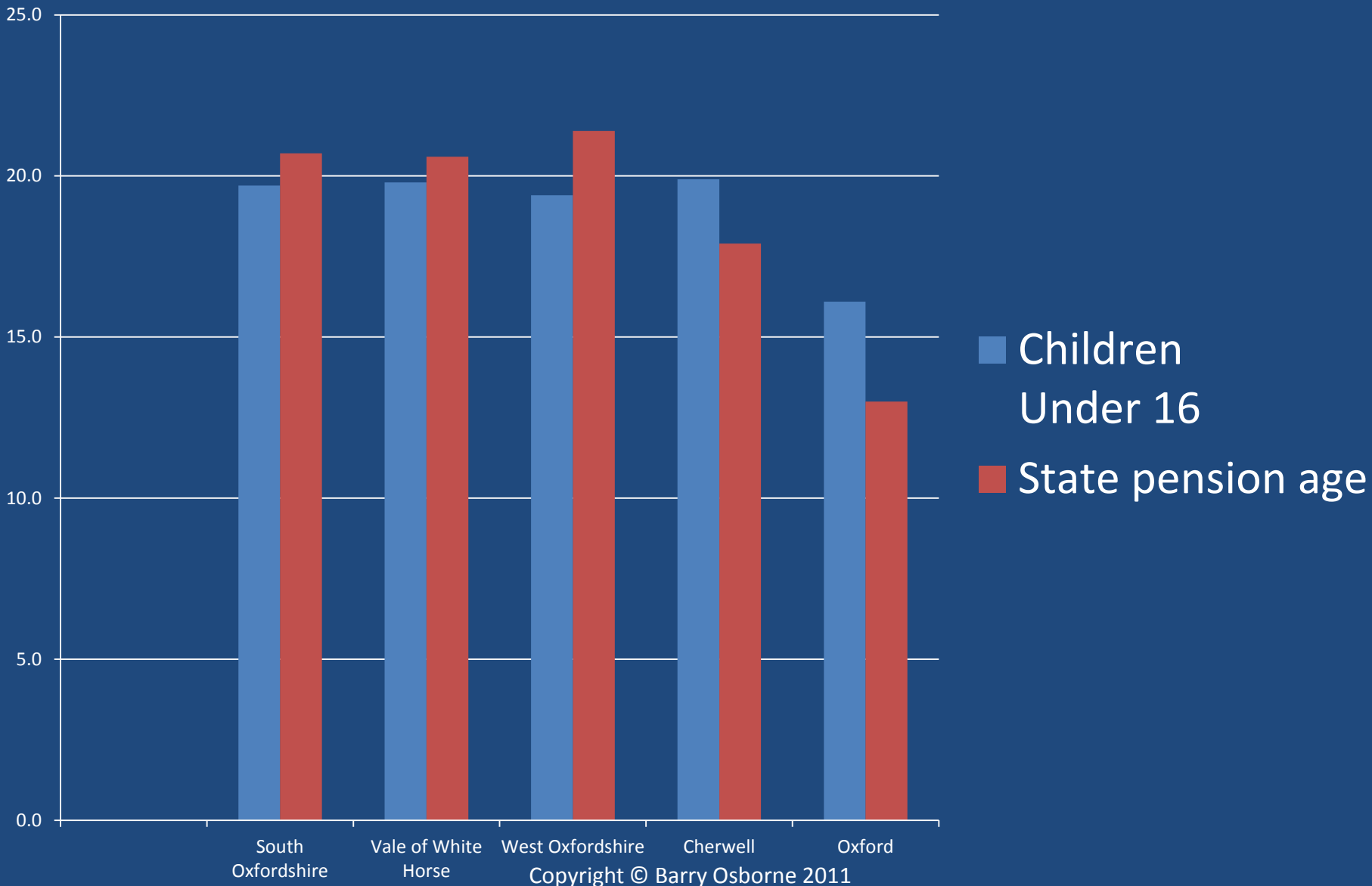
# Oxfordshire Districts

- Oxford Urban District 155,000
- Cherwell 138,500 (12% hgrowth over 10 yrs); 40% of live in 70 settlements fewer than 3500
- South Oxfordshire 128,000; 65% in over 80 small villages
- West Oxfordshire 95,640; 58% in 83 villages fewer than 5,000
- Vale of White Horse 117,000; 44% in villages fewer than 5,000.

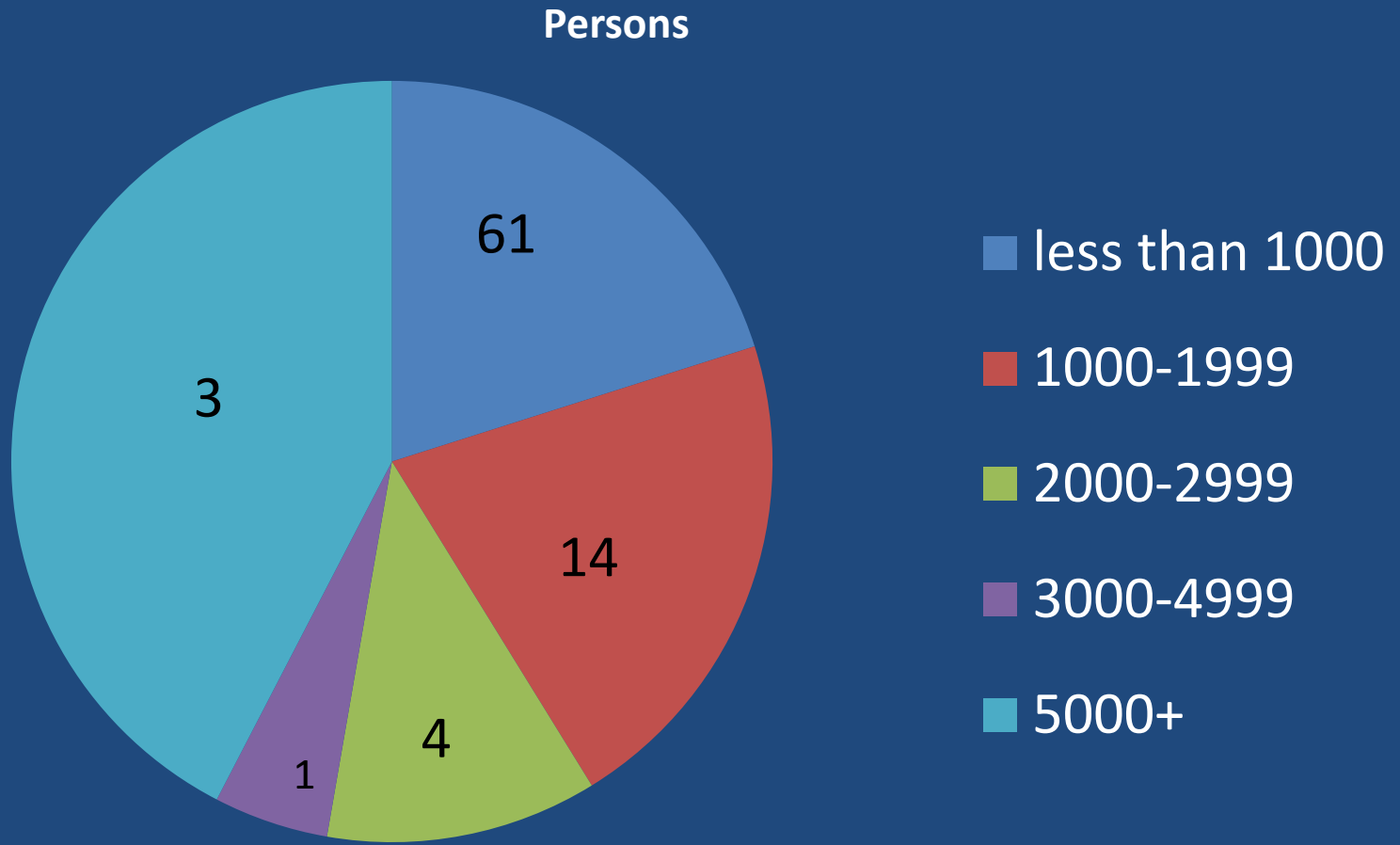
# Oxfordshire – age distribution



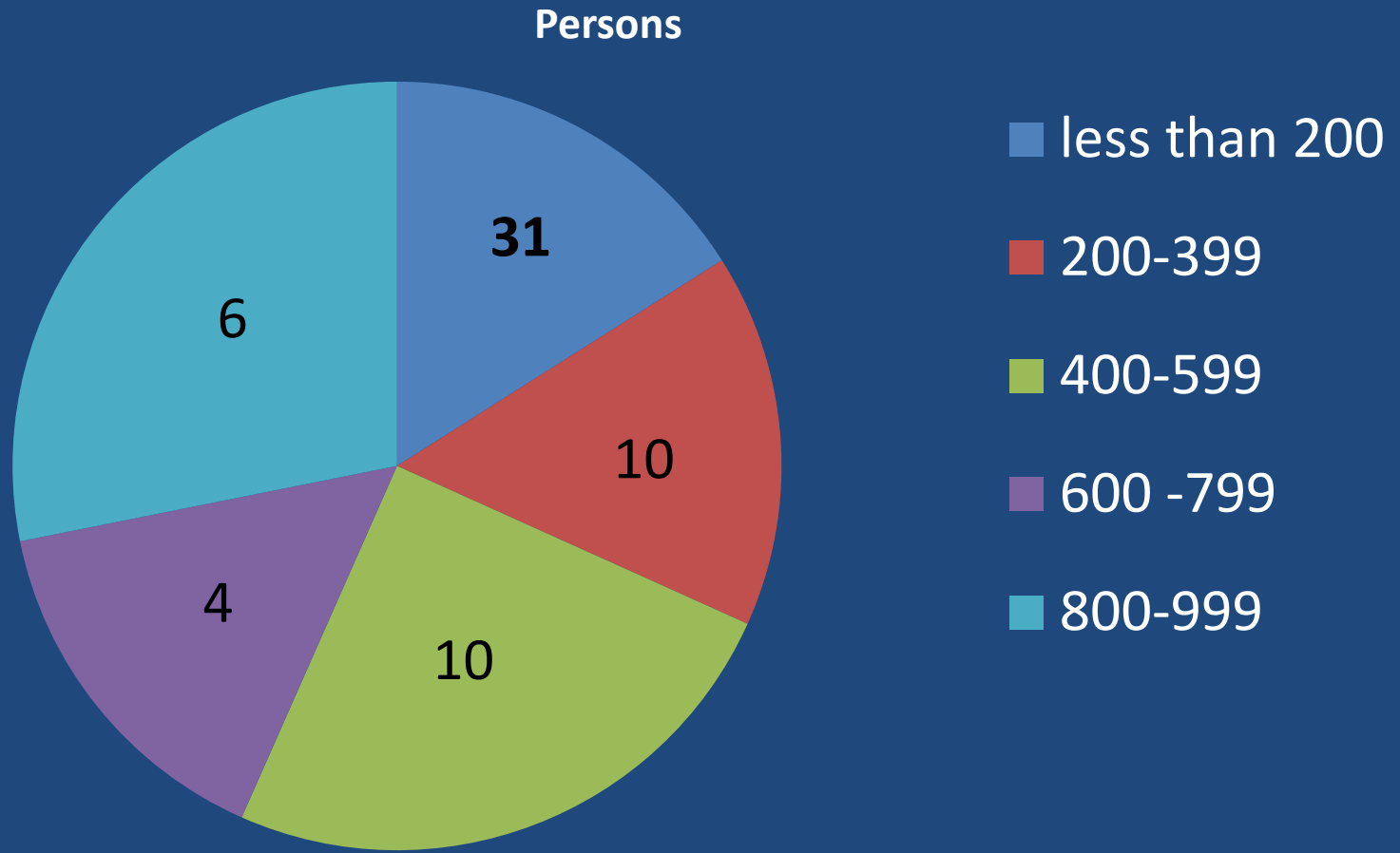
# Oxfordshire – age distribution



# West Oxfordshire settlement size



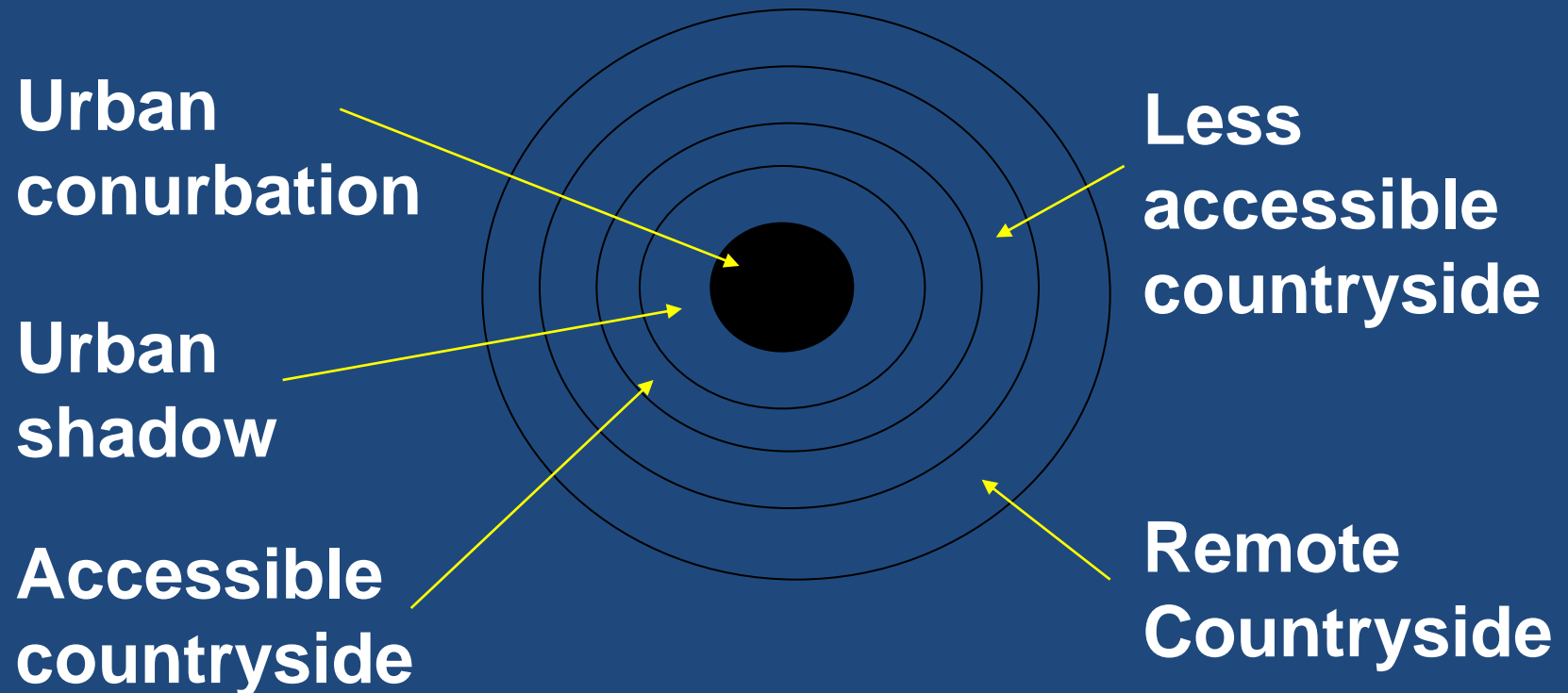
# West Oxfordshire smaller settlements



# The proximity model

Rt. Rev'd Dr. Anthony Russell

The further people live from a conurbation the more distinctly different their way of life



# Current or historic economic factors also form the life of the community



Industrial

Agricultural



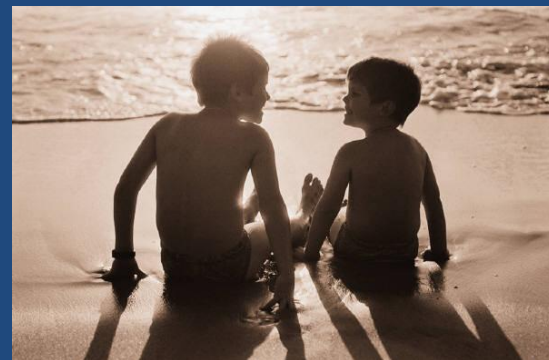
Commuter



Fishing



Leisure



# Village life affected by ...

Size and morphology

Proximity to larger towns

Socio-economic history

Degree of incomer influence



**Villages vary considerably  
and are made up of people  
from a wide range of  
social groups with  
different agendas.**



# Who lives in rural Britain?

- Indigenous villagers
- Historic land owners
- New land owners
- Farmers etc
- Retired people
- Professional people
- Movers and shakers
- "The Good Life" people
- Suburban commuters

**Second Home owners**

# Characteristics and behaviour patterns that can develop in small communities

- Cautious
- Conservative
- Insular
- Suspicion
- Intransigent
- Diffident
- As a community

A complex network of social interaction

Rural communities are unique, complex combinations of various factors



# What defines rural culture?

## 50 years ago

- Strong links between the people and the place.
- Limits to mobility
- Self contained
- Parochial mindset
- Limited experience
- Low expectations

## Today

- Incomers and suburbanisation
- Physical & social mobility
- Global access
- Satellite communities
- Wide experience
- High expectation

# What defines rural culture?

50 Years ago you lived there because...

It was “your world”

It was where you worked

You were landed gentry

Today indigenous villagers are in decline

It is a place for a better lifestyle and an  
up-market lifestyle

It is also a place of leisure

# Rural Spirituality 50 years ago

- Going to church was normal
- Non-conformity was strong
- Non-Christian beliefs/practices were seen as weird
- There was either inherited traditions or inherited traditions
- Faith was demonstrated and measured by commitment to the institutional structures

# Rural Spirituality Today

- The Church belongs to us - if we need it
- Church is seen as non-essential to faith
- Marginal and hybrid forms of faith are praiseworthy – only traditional Christians are weird!
- Faith is no longer tied to scripture
- You cannot evaluate or judge customised faith systems. Absolutely no absolutes!

A scenic view of a rural village with a church spire, surrounded by green fields and trees under a blue sky. The text "The State of the Rural Churches" is overlaid in large black font.

# The State of the Rural Churches

# What churches are present in rural England?

- 63% Church of England
- 26% Methodist
- 5% Baptist
- 3% URC and Continuing Congregational
- 3% Others

# Closed places of worship



Methodist sold  
approx. 3,000  
church  
buildings  
1963-1973.

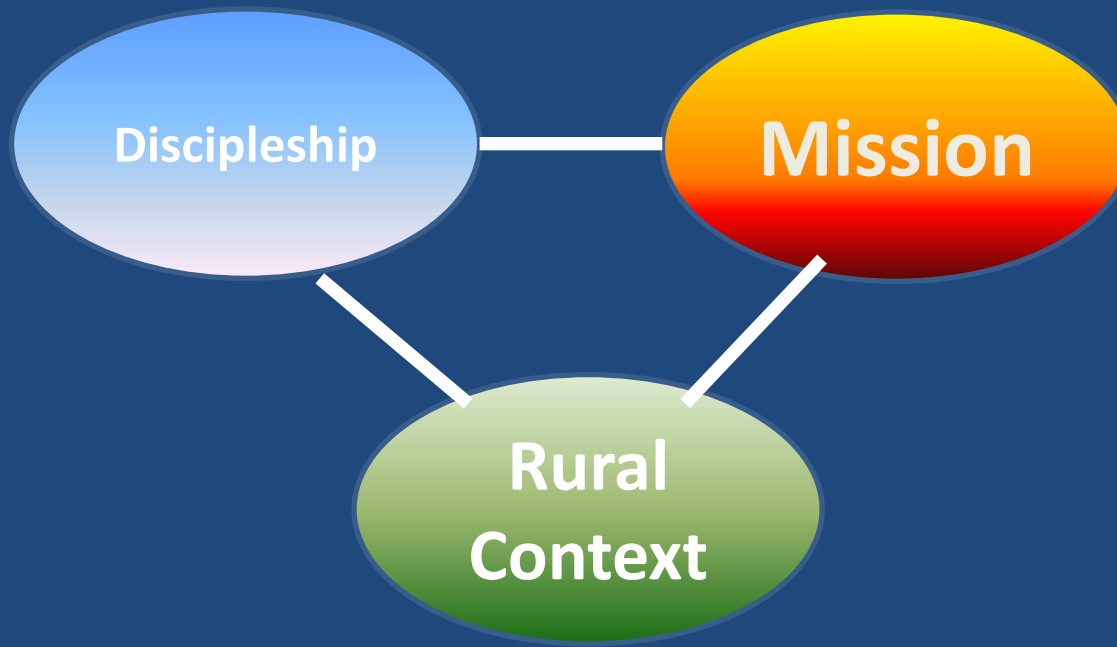
URC sold 10%  
of buildings  
soon after  
formation in  
1972.

# Rural Churches

- Past declining attendance
- Multi-parish benefices
- Reduction in regular services
- Loss of thousands of non-conformist churches
- Maintenance burden
- Ecumenical relationships often poor
- Commuting to worship

# Worship Issues

- Tangerines are not small oranges (*understand the differences*)
- Making worship style and contents culturally relevant
- Quality leadership in ministry vital
- Disaffection with inherited patterns
- Numbers –usually small
- Multi-generational & multi-cultural issues



## Part 2: Reflecting on discipleship

# Two most common understandings

- **Devotional**
  - Quality of relationship with God
  - Personal holiness
- **Missional**
  - A desire to serve
  - Personal commitment (dedication of life/time)
  - Actively involved

**Not either but both?**

# Discipleship – a third way

- God's call always carries the sense of purpose God has for each one of us.
- We are members of one body – each one purposefully gifted and purposefully placed.
- Discipleship should lead to understanding God's equipping and something of his purpose.
- Our goal as disciples: being & doing what pleases Him

# Four expressions of the same commission

- Matthew – make disciples then baptise and teach them

- Mark – proclaim the gospel

- Luke – be my witnesses **μάρτυρας**

– Greek word means ‘to testify’

- John – As the Father sent me so I send you

– Greek word for ‘as’ means in the same manner

**καθώς**

# Discipleship – becoming more like Jesus

- All four expressions of the ‘Great Commission’ must be held together.
- Our model for discipling must be Jesus.
- Learning/living by kingdom principles
- Demonstrating the character of God
- Incarnate – lived out in ordinary life
- BEWARE of militaristic expressions of discipleship

# Synonyms for Disciple

Student?

Trainee?

Apprentice?

Being mentored?

*“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.” Matthew 10:24/25*

# Stay true to the revelation of God in Christ

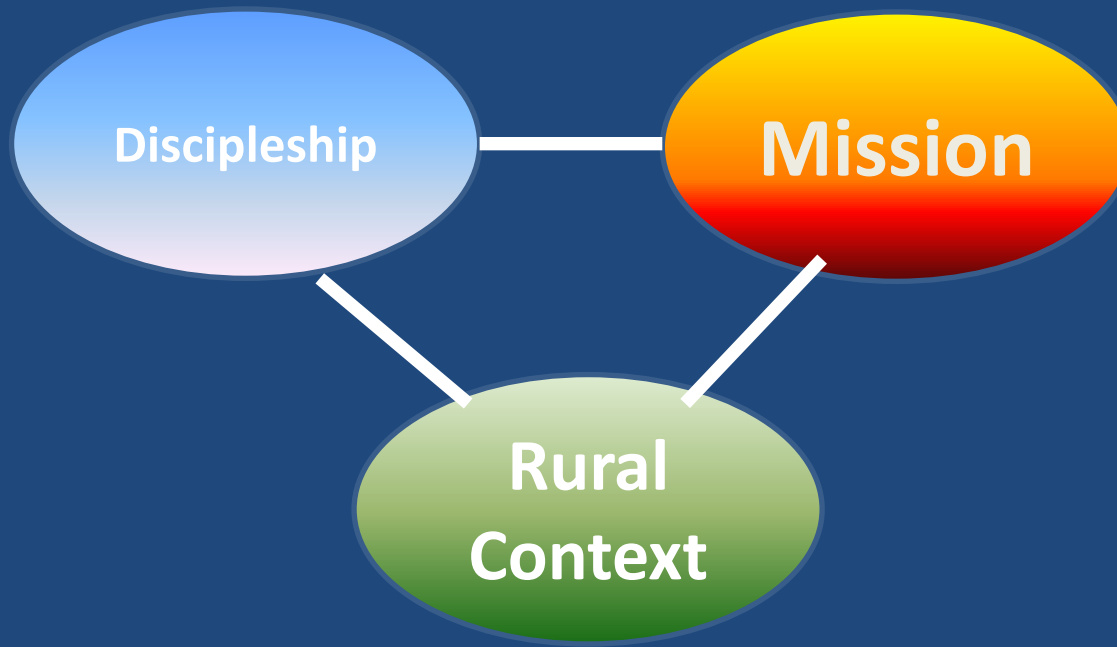
*“If the Carpenter of Nazareth would seem  
strangely out of place  
in the midst of all you are seeking to do,  
then all you are seeking to do  
has got nothing to do with God!”*

*Former Bishop of Lewes*

# Discipleship expressed in a congregational covenant

In response to God's gracious promises and commands, we covenant to walk together in all the ways of the Lord, as he has revealed them or will reveal them through his Spirit and through the scriptures.

We freely and gladly bind ourselves, his grace enabling us, to live in loving communion with one another as becomes members of a church of Christ.



## Part 3: Reflecting on mission

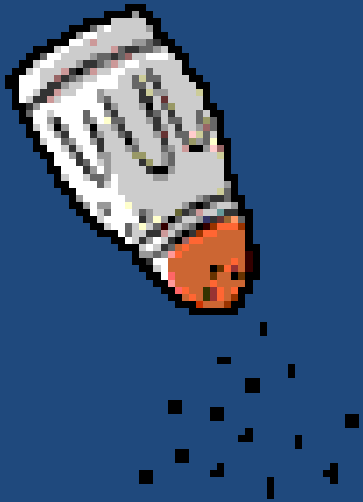
# Mission should be holistic demonstrating all five marks of mission

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

**Not a menu from which we select favourites**

Our mission involves...

# Words + Works



“You are the salt of the earth” Matthew 5:13

“You are the light of the world” Matthew 5:14

# Tailoring Mission to fit Rural Churches



*“A good mission strategy is more than a bright idea; it must combine an appropriate response to the cultural context, sound theology and good practice.”*

# The Theological Premise

- **God has a purpose in his world today**
- **Each Christian has a unique role within God's purpose**
- **Each church (as a unique combination of these unique Christians) has a unique role within God's purpose**

# The Strategy Models

- Bespoke tailoring  
it has to both suit & fit  
church and community
- Teaching someone to ride a bicycle  
providing knowledge & confidence  
to enable sustained local mission



# Four steps to Developing Missionary Congregations

Create a common understanding of mission  
and evangelism

Create a shared sense of priority for mission

Determine appropriate strategies

Be prepared to manage change

# Rural Mission Solutions

(formerly Rural Sunrise)

A mission consultancy helping small and rural churches to understand and engage in their part within God's mission today.

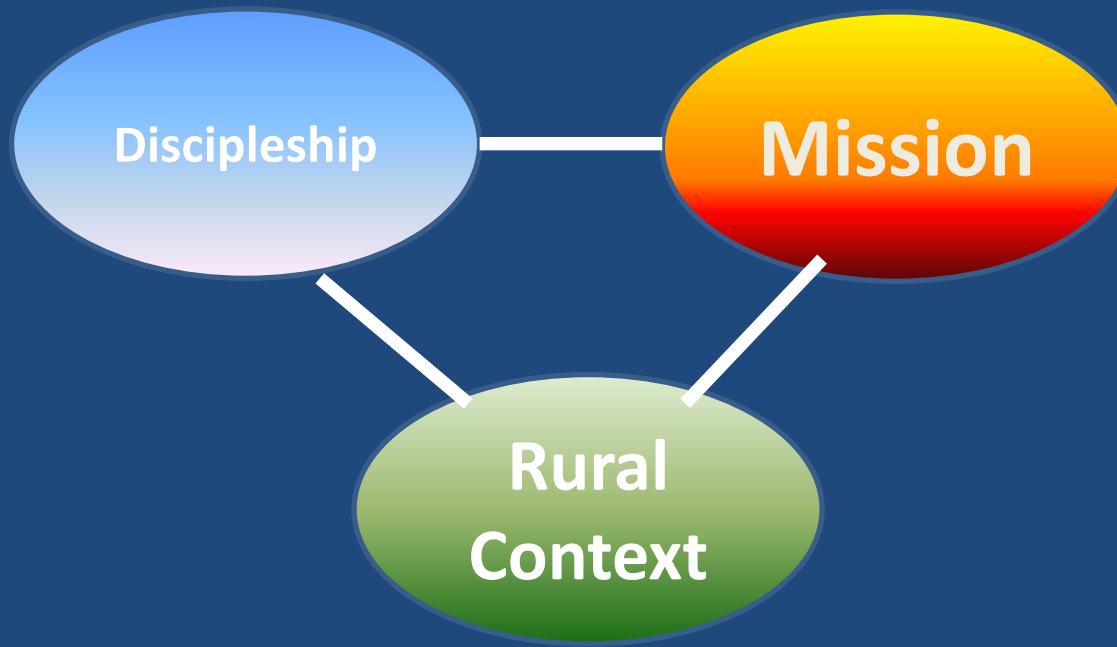
Support offered through consultations, away days, or weekend focused events

Centre for Rural Mission  
4 Clarence Street, Market Harborough  
LE16 7NE

[www.ruralmissionsolutions.org.uk](http://www.ruralmissionsolutions.org.uk)



*"Too many rural Christians are staring at the place where yesterday's sun went down. But a new day is dawning and we must turn and greet the sunrise."*



## Part 3a: Reflecting on evangelism

# Rural Evangelism is more effective where

- The methods are culturally relevant for the target group
- The local church is held in respect
- It is a natural expression of a caring Christian community
- It responds to the social traits of rural life
- It is “home grown” rather than imported
- It is not too “loud”

# Rural Evangelism is less effective where...

- The church congregation is not drawn from the local community
- It is not in the context of the other four “marks of mission”
- Where the church does not demonstrate genuine interest in the life of the wider community
- It appears to be generated by self-interest
- Methods are inappropriate to rural context

# What are the main issues?

- Lack of confidence in the gospel
- Competing demands for the resources of
  - Time
  - Money
  - People
- Survival mentality obscures mission vision
- Inappropriate strategies set by urbanites
- Evangelising in your back yard

# What would make it possible?

- A better comprehension of the gospel of Christ
- Developed confidence in articulating our faith
- A shared missionary vision
- Prioritising mission not maintenance
- Discovering and using appropriate models for evangelism



# Rural Evangelism Network

Ecumenical

Members are the Churches  
and Mission Agencies

Sharing insight and experience

Encouraging good practice

Conferences

Publications

Consultations

Interactive Website

[www.ruralmissions.org.uk](http://www.ruralmissions.org.uk)

# Contact Details

Both the  
**Rural Evangelism Network and  
Rural Mission Solutions**

can be contacted at

**Centre for Rural Mission**

4 Clarence Street  
Market Harborough

LE16 7NE

[info@ruralmissions.org.uk](mailto:info@ruralmissions.org.uk)