Lemon Drizzle Cake & other fruit of the Spirit

A Condensed Companion Guide

A summary of the book by Yann Dubreuil and Alex Pease (2020), subtitled The Countryside for Charismatics. This guide is a companion, not a substitute: it distils the main ideas in our own words. For the full stories, interviews and detail, please read the book.

Who the book is for

The book is written for New Wine and HTB-style ministers who have just taken on, or are about to take on, a rural benefice with little rural experience, usually coming from a lively city or suburban church. It is practical, not a theology of the rural church, and it rests on one assumption: the church exists to love God, love neighbour and make disciples. The examples come mostly from Hampshire, and the authors say plainly that not everything will transfer to, say, Northumberland.

The big idea

The key test of a rural church is not whether the building is full at Christmas and Easter. It is whether people are coming to faith in Jesus there, so that they would say their real journey began in that church. The authors distinguish **consumers** (people who attend but whose life decisions are not much affected by Jesus) from **followers** (people for whom being his disciple is a very significant part of life).

Their answer to how this happens is to bring God into the ordinary and naturally occurring life of a village, rather than importing every method from a city church. Hence the title: even making lemon drizzle cake can become spiritually significant when it is done for the Kingdom.

Chapter by chapter

1. Introduction

- The rural church is different from the city church and full of traps for the unwary. People have long memories, and a new minister can damage things in the first week.
- Rural ministry is mostly not about farming. Expect more accountants, teachers and tradespeople than farmers.

- Most rural parishes are "middle Anglican" and wary of extremes. Avoid highlighting differences of churchmanship; focus on theological conviction and on why the church is where it is.
- The rural church is often the only show in town, so be ready to lead BCP Communion, Evensong and Matins well. Ask the regulars how.
- The biggest practical problem is the sheer number of churches, PCCs and officers a rector must manage.

2. The lie of the land

Why bother with the rural church? The numbers make the case:

- About 10.4% of Britain's population live in settlements of 1,000 or fewer people. Including larger villages and country towns, rural deaneries represent around 16% of the UK population.
- Rural churches are about two thirds of Church of England parishes and 40% of worshippers.
- The claim of a huge clergy-to-population imbalance between rural and urban areas looks much weaker once other denominations are counted.
- In Winchester Diocese, the worshipping community is 4.3% of the population in rural deaneries, against 2.3% in mixed and 1.2% in urban ones.
- Roughly 18% of churches are growing, whether rural or urban. Growth does not depend on location.

3. Making followers

- The three-part calling is to love God, love neighbour and make disciples. The third is the acid test.
- It is easy to fill the diary with village events that lead nowhere in terms of discipleship. Be soft-hearted but hard-headed.
- Discernment matters. Look for the fruit of the Spirit, responsiveness to Jesus' voice, the questions people ask, and involvement in home groups. Do not judge people's final standing; that belongs to God.
- Re-read the parable of the sower: there is no category for sowing and seeing only a few disciples. A few true disciples are first fruits. Ask "Have I been faithful?"
- Revd Bob Earnshaw's short, controversial ministry shows how quickly fruit can come, and what it can cost.

4. Starting well

- Picture the whole village watching you on a stage. Whether the community favours you matters a great deal.
- Many villagers support the church out of loyalty to the village, not personal faith. Be careful with Christian jargon ("evangelism" may be better said as "good-newsing").
- It matters more to be liked by the non-church community than by every churchgoer. A well-regarded rector is hard for opponents to undermine.
- Distinguish good popularity (people feel loved, so you can be prophetic) from bad popularity (you never challenge anyone). Choose carefully which hills to die on.
- Followers of Christ in the congregation are a great asset, but they have their own temptations: sport on Sundays, pride in the one virtue they find easy, and reluctance to make sacrifices.
- Popularity is not the aim. The test is what lasts after you leave.

5. Relationships

The chapter is built around short exhortations:

- **Be kind.** An elderly Catholic priest's advice to Yann.
- **Be a friend.** Be genuinely interested in people; they will then be interested in you. Don't treat people as targets.
- **Be patient.** Walk or cycle round the villages at holiday pace, learn names (including children and dogs), and let the other person set the topic.
- **Be willing to stay.** Aim for ten years or more; much of the work is slow and evolutionary.
- **Be wise.** In a village, difficult people never go away, and gossip reaches you.
- **Be willing to be chaplain to the community.** It is a privilege and gives a platform a city church would envy. Think of Dixon of Dock Green rather than Z Cars.
- **Be a pastor, be present, be yourself.** Visit, listen, pray, turn up to village events, wear the collar deliberately, guard your family time and your boundaries, and be undefended and willing to be known.

6. Evangelism

- In the country, everyone you meet you will meet again, so evangelism must be patient and relational. Villagers can be wary of the word.
- Think in terms of a process (for example, Don Everts' five thresholds), starting with simple friendship.

- **Meet people at their point of need.** Itchen Valley's "Who Cares?" survey (a one-question door-knock; over half of households took part) found that over 40% of answers concerned relationships. So forgiveness needs to be central to teaching.
- Parenting and marriage courses worked as pre-evangelistic steps, building community confidence before Alpha. Bereavement groups ("Living with Loss") did similarly.
- Social action should be clearly done in the church's name. If people can't tell the church is behind it, it isn't really mission.
- Alpha is not the only route. Others used "Food for Thought" evenings, "God in the pub", and drip-by-drip apologetics. But whatever the method, have a regular, ongoing process, and have home groups for people to move into.
- Among 19 interviewees, five pointed to how a minister or other follower treated them, thirteen to something outside Sunday worship (Alpha, a home group), and one to a direct touch of the Spirit.
- Honour ordinary gifts. Encourage the cake-maker and the quiet audio-visual volunteer, because both are doing something spiritually significant.
- Bentley, Froyle and Binsted grew to nearly 100 people in twelve home groups from none in 1995. Eating together and men's groups (starting in the pub) mattered.

7. The Holy Spirit in a rural context

- Rural congregations can be wary of anything that feels like hands in the air and hard-to-sing choruses, but the Spirit is the rural rector's best friend.
- Pray as you walk and ask to be shown where God is working. Several short encounters in the book arose this way.
- Healing: calling the parish to a 24-hour prayer day for a young mother needing a kidney drew many who rarely attended. Yann's three prayer meetings show that community prayer has an effect even when outcomes differ.
- Tongues and similar gifts are best explored on Alpha or in home groups rather than in the main services. Prayer ministry can be offered quietly after services.

8. Lively services

- Ask whether your congregation mirrors the census. Younger generations may simply stay away from formal liturgy.
- Try things, and don't worry when something fails. Examples in the book include Odiham's informal service (recorded worship music, children's church, prayer ministry), Itchen Valley's monthly all-age worship and Valley Worship, and Yann's "Live at Five", with its tea, cake and fun.

- Small additions can open doors: inviting people to bring their service card to the rail for prayer drew a quarter of one congregation.
- New wine in old wineskins may be more about hearts than structures. Bring God into the traditional (even a pet service or blessing a pack of beagles) and it changes in character.

9. Occasional offices, annual events and graveyards

- The rector should lead these personally; delegating can look like not caring.
- Weddings are a large evangelistic and community opportunity. Funeral and wedding addresses should honour the family, be personal and not "get at" anyone, while still giving the gospel a place.
- Baptism policies are a real point of difference between the authors. Bob Earnshaw's strict policy in the 1980s was in hindsight a mistake. Baptism preparation is a rich moment of reflection for new parents.
- Events such as the Way of the Cross and Carols in the Barn draw in people on the edges (who often enjoy being Roman soldiers!) and lead naturally to invitations to Alpha.
- Put diocesan and parish rules on memorials clearly on your website.

10. School and youth work

- The primary school relationship is key, especially to keep contact with families after the toddler group.
- A youth group (UTX) grew out of a primary-school year group. Teenagers' questions can be surprisingly sophisticated.
- For assemblies, the main rule is "Don't be boring." Being a governor, even at a non-church school, is a way into an important community.

11. How to run a rural parish

- A rector needs to be a leader, pastor and manager. Rural churches need entrepreneurial leadership, but safeguarding, finance and weddings must be handled correctly.
- Build a team of pastoral visitors, and consider a paid half-time administrator (the book suggests the cost may be £10,000 to £15,000), as this frees the rector for people.
- Volunteers need to be personally asked, inspired and thanked. Let them follow what God puts on their hearts rather than your to-do list.

- Consider Bob Jackson's idea of a **focal minister** in each community, lay or ordained, living locally. Canon law limits what lay people may do, so use the permissions available.
- Keep churchwardens close, chair the PCC firmly and kindly, and remember that procedurally correct is not always pastorally right (see Alex's contested-election mistake).
- Distinguish giving as discipleship from fundraising. Keep communication simple and consistent, and mind data protection.

12. Moving from a multi-parish benefice to a multi-church parish

- Benefits include a shared sense of purpose, faster change, fewer officers, more time for mission, easier clergy recruitment, and the ability to specialise by church (the "layered cake" idea).
- Disadvantages include potential loss of engagement in smaller villages, and a hard process that can be derailed by even one community.
- A merger needs an agreed scheme, approved by a two-thirds majority, with District Church Councils that keep local responsibility for buildings and fundraising but not money or policy.
- Tips for achieving it: strong, favoured leadership; take money concerns seriously; allow separate fabric funds and "Friends" groups; get repairs done first; involve your most capable officers; and talk to likely opponents early.
- Good tests of whether to merge: does it match the primary school catchment, and can the rector cycle round it in a morning?

13. Conclusion

A new minister can feel they have stepped back in time, starting not at zero but "at minus 50" because of an early misstep. The authors hope the book helps readers avoid this and enjoy seeing God at work in the countryside.

Appendix: How I became a follower of Christ in the rural church

Nineteen first-person testimonies. Common threads include a minister or neighbour who showed genuine care, a course or home group outside Sunday worship, bereavement or illness as an opening, and slow-burn journeys rather than single moments.

Ten take-aways at a glance

1. Measure the church by discipleship, not just attendance.
2. Be the village's chaplain: present, kind, patient and willing to stay.

3. Win the community's goodwill first. It protects your ability to lead.
4. Avoid jargon and don't import city methods wholesale.
5. Bring God into what the village already does.
6. Meet people at their point of need, then offer a clear path (Alpha or similar, then home groups).
7. Honour ordinary gifts such as hospitality, tech and kindness.
8. Guard your family time and manage the legal and administrative basics well.
9. Empower volunteers and consider focal ministers.
10. Consider merging parishes where the villages truly belong together.

Questions for reflection or group discussion

- Who in our community has become a follower of Christ in recent years, and what played a part?
- What do we do that people would enjoy but that leads nowhere in discipleship?
- Where is our community's point of need? How would we find out?
- Which gifts in our congregation could be named as spiritually significant?
- What path do we offer after a social event or a course?
- Where might we be "at minus 50" with someone, and how could we repair it?

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