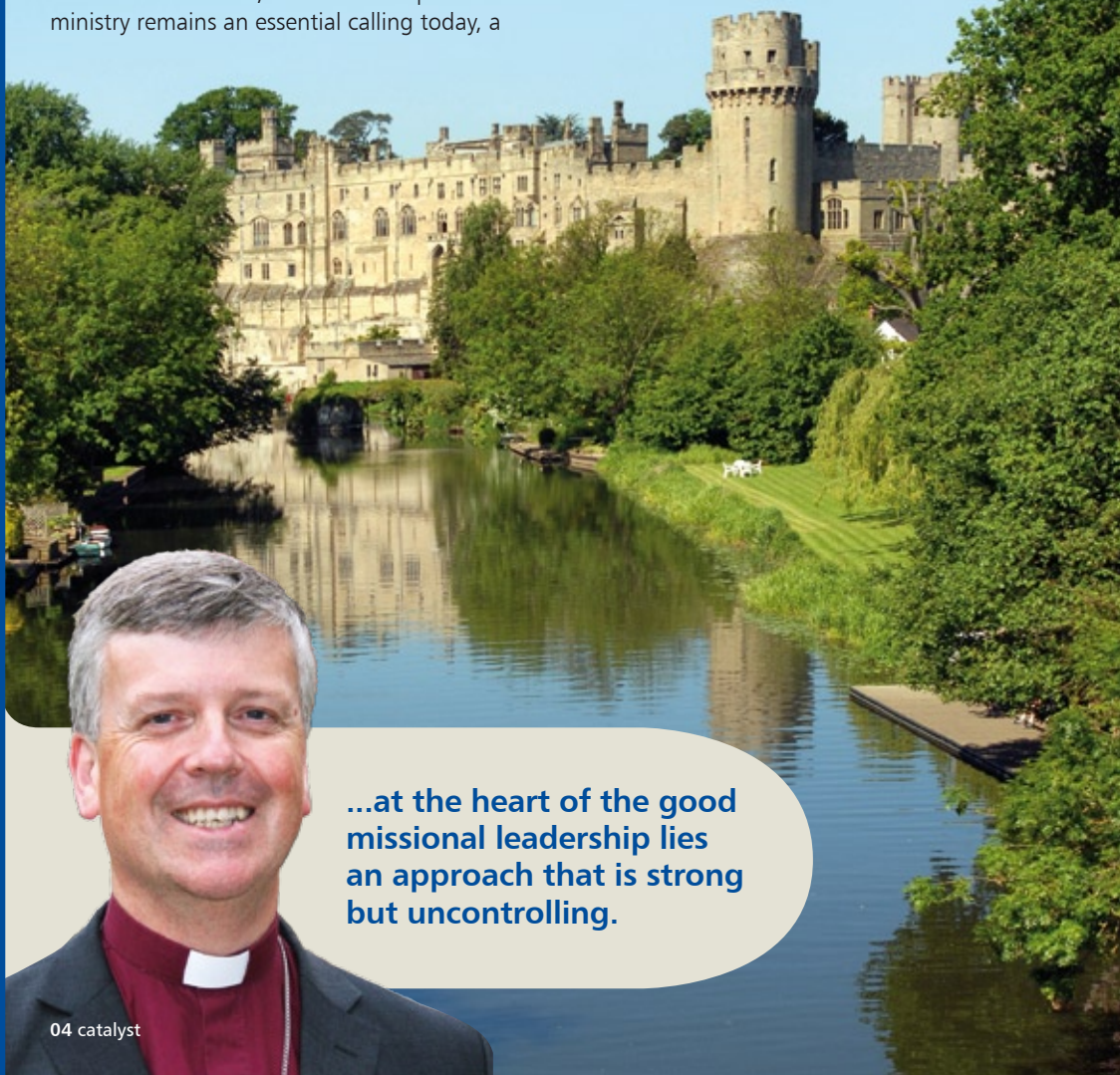


missional leadership: the landscape park

As a long-term supporter of CPAS, and a graduate from the first-ever *Arrow Leadership Programme*, I'm delighted that missional leadership is right at the heart of the organisation's vision, both founding and future. Two of the great triumvirate of Old Testament leaders (Abraham, Moses and David) were trained as shepherds; all three of Jesus' closest disciples (Peter, James and John) were trained as fishermen; and while the pastoral ministry remains an essential calling today, a

deafness to our second calling to 'put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch' will effectively sign the Church's death warrant in this, as in every, generation.

What though do missional leaders look like? Are they simply gifted personal evangelists writ large, or is there a wider pool from which such leadership can be sensibly drawn?



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In both my experience and my reading of Scripture (especially the Book of Acts) there are two key issues here – one of strength, the other of control. All leadership, whether in the Church or outside of it, can be strong or weak, controlling or uncontrolling; and at the heart of the good missional leadership lies an approach that is strong but uncontrolling.

Perhaps we might see it in terms of four gardens: the wilderness, the bonsai garden, the formal garden and the landscape park:

The wilderness is the fruit of a leadership that is weak and uncontrolling, resulting in a plethora of weeds, an absence of pruning, and the largest of plants (however fruitless) overshadowing the rest. Those who lead 'wilderness' churches are generally referred to in terms of the adjectives 'poor' and 'old': 'poor old Vicar: he means well, but it must be a thankless task'. Meanwhile it's a dominating parishioner or churchwarden or choir who really calls the shots.

The bonsai garden is the fruit of a leadership that is weak and controlling, resulting in plants being lovingly managed and cut to shape, a fastidious neatness in every aspect of church life, and an environment in which the vicar does it all so nicely that no one wants to interfere. Bonsai gardeners are admired for their hard work and for the lovely display they produce every Sunday morning. Meanwhile the garden remains very beautiful and generally very small.

Strong, controlling leadership lies behind the formal garden, the wonderfully planned, perfectly symmetrical adjunct to many a fairytale chateau in the Loire Valley and beyond: and in church terms there can be real energy in such an approach, with a bulky five-year strategic plan giving a clear sense of direction and priorities, and with everyone invited to play their part in the fulfilment of that bulky five-year strategic plan. Some plants will thrive in such an environment – those that are not too large, perhaps, or who value order, conformity, predictability. Others will be made to feel that they somehow don't fit, and will resist being cut back simply to fulfil the chief gardener's vision.

It's the English landscape park – the work of such inspiring garden designers as the legendary Lancelot 'Capability' Brown – that presents us with the vision of a leadership that is strong but uncontrolling: a leadership where it's not the intricate garden design that takes your breath away (for at first sight it hardly looks designed at all), but rather the views and the vistas, the lakes and the trees – the latter all planted to best advantage and able to reach their fullest stature.

The 'landscape park' church is more an organisation than an organisation, more a sailing ship (setting its sails to the direction of the wind) than a bus (stopping at certain predetermined destinations). It takes seriously the uniqueness



of the body of believers that God has called together in a place – their gifts and experiences, passions and enthusiasms – rather than attempting to impose any kind of blueprint, along with all the trimmings that a particular churchmanship demands of it. It lives by the Pentecost premise that it's often the unlikeliest of people who receive the most God-given of visions and dreams.

So what kind of qualities are required in the missional leader? Faith, collaboration, the ability to inspire, certainly; but above all, a deep inner security that is content to allow others to succeed. Perhaps it's not surprising that business guru Jim Collins – in his research on companies that had moved from 'good to great' – discovered that the two qualities that characterised the leadership of those companies were an 'intense professional will' (corresponding to the word 'strong') and an 'extreme personal humility' (corresponding to the word 'uncontrolling').

Andrew Watson is Bishop of Aston, and author of the books *The Fourfold Leadership of Jesus: Come, Follow, Wait, Go* (BRF 2008) and *Confidence in the Living God: David and Goliath Revisited* (BRF 2009).