



Bijan Omrani

The Parish: the heart of the Church of England

MY EXPERIENCE VOLUNTEERING at my parish church has shown me more than anything its fundamental importance in the local mission of Christ. It is a stable point in the landscape that has proclaimed the gospel for generations, where people know to find spiritual solace and good news, to connect with the clergy who have the cure of their souls, to develop the bonds of community and the practice of Christian life. The parish church and the parish system may be old, but they are a “goodly heritage”: still wonderfully effective for bringing the message of Christ to local communities.

The neglect of the local

Despite this, for several decades the local parishes have been starved of the funds they need to do their work. Their assets have been moved to the control of distant central bodies and have been swallowed up by growing bureaucracies and flashy but ineffective initiatives.

This has led to church closures, parish amalgamations, lay volunteers being asked to do ever more, and huge stress being put on dedicated clergy, who find it harder to live out their calling to serve God’s people. It means it is more difficult to proclaim effectively the Word of Christ.

A hard impact: clergy, parishes and the poor

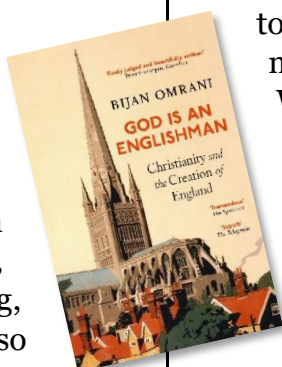
There are now just 6,295 paid clergy, a historic low, and down by 28% from 2000. Some parishes are being grouped into mega-benefices of 20 or even 30 churches, an impossible task for any priest. 40% of the church closures are impacting the 10% of the most deprived parishes.

A time for repair

This is one of the biggest challenges to face the Church in our time. Without the sure foundation of properly funded parishes with well-supported clergy, it will be ever more difficult for the church to fulfil its mission. I am therefore standing as part of the **Save the Parish** movement, which has an effective programme to tackle these problems. As a General Synod member, these would be my priorities:

I AM A CHURCHWARDEN in Shute, a rural parish in East Devon. Together with a colleague, I am responsible for a mother church, St Michael’s, Shute, and a daughter chapel, St Mary-at-the-Cross, Whitford. I have volunteered in the parish for eight years, and working with a wonderful group of clergy and volunteers, it has been a privilege to see the growth of worship, with the re-opening of the Whitford Chapel after a long period of closure, the introduction of a choir, new services and parish events, and a successful fundraising campaign to restore the fabric and monuments at St Michael’s Church.

I was baptised at the age of 18, much influenced by the Anglican spirituality of George Herbert and the English choral tradition. Since then, I have worked in book publishing, writing, journalism, Classics teaching, and as a historian. I have also trained as a barrister, and been a charity trustee, and school governor. I am the author of ***God is an Englishman: Christianity and the Creation of England*** a history of what Christianity gave to England culturally and spiritually, and why it is still vital to us. The work on this book, which was endorsed as “superb” by Rowan Williams, together with my experience of the parish, has supported my deep affection for the Church of England as it brings people to Christ and a fullness of life. I hope, by advocacy in the General Synod, I can play a further part in this mission.



Qualifications for Service

IT IS NOT JUST from my long-term experience as a volunteer for my parish that I hope I am fitted to stand for General Synod. My other work also fits me to be an effective advocate and to make a positive difference through the Synod.

My training as a **barrister**, along with my experience as a **teacher**, **school governor** and **charity trustee** (The Royal Society for Asian Affairs) fits me to deal with the legislative and procedural complexities, not to mention speech-making and advocacy.

How to save your parish church

Be the Church you want to see in the world

ARTILLERY ROW By **Bijan Omrani** 6 April, 2026

My **knowledge of the history of the Church of England**, shown through my published writing, allows me to be independent-minded, and a critical friend. I have not been slow to encourage or critique through my journalism where necessary.

Since the 2025 publication of *God is an Englishman* I have lectured on

Church matters across the country, from audiences of bishops and academics in cathedrals to local rural parishes. This has both given me a deep insight into the state of the Church, and also many contacts with whom I can work to get things done.

If elected, I look forward to serving you.

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Lecture at Chichester Cathedral, April 2026

Proper support for parishes

The Church Commissioners, whose historic charitable task is to help with the cure of souls in the parishes that most need it, have an endowment of nearly £12 billion. However, since changes in 2018, only eight percent of their money is ring-fenced for parishes. This needs to change: money should go to the parishes that need it, with no grant applications or strings attached.

Money for mission and the frontline

There has been a huge increase in money spent on central overheads. For example, diocesan overheads have grown by 29% in three years, to £156 million, and they are employing on average one member of staff for three-and-a-half clergy. The usual ratio for charity administrative to frontline staff is one to eight. Proper discipline is needed, and money must not be wasted on initiatives or administration that is not vital to the Church's mission.

Care for the Clergy

I have seen the difference made when clergy are well-supported. Unfortunately, too many are under too much pressure. Nearly a third report symptoms of depression, and even more report loneliness and a sense that they are not helped by leadership. We must put an end to cutting stipendiary posts and the creation of impractical mega-benefices, and ensure that the ordinary work of clergy in parishes is properly valued.

Support for proper clergy training

The number of ordinations has declined, and access to residential courses and a full programme of deep theological training for clergy has become rarer. Clergy need to be given the support to develop their theological knowledge to the full to best preach the Word of Christ in this time of intellectual ferment.

Support for volunteers

Volunteers are critical for the mission of the Church and their service to the wider community. However, they are becoming more difficult to find. Whilst maintaining safeguarding, we need to remove needless burdens of bureaucracy, and make sure that they are not left without clergy support by long vacancies.

A voice for parishes

If a church is threatened with closure, a parish with amalgamation, a vicarage with sale, the needs and will of the parishioners must be listened to properly, and their treatment must be fair and just.