The General Synod has backed the parish as key to the spreading of the message of the Christian faith, in a debate where the local church was described as ‘at the very heart’ of God’s mission.

Members were told that the parish system is central to the Church of England’s Vision for growth, in a debate led by Rev Canon Kate Wharton, (pictured) a General Synod member for the Diocese of Liverpool.

“The parish system exists not so that we can be territorial and protective of ‘our patch’ and work only in our own silos, but so that we can ensure that every single soul in the land is held within a system in which they matter and can be known,” she told the General Synod.

The General Synod members voted to welcome the Church’s commitment to increasing the numbers of ordinands, as well as an increasing emphasis on lay ministry and the expansion of Licenced Lay Ministers.

Synod members further voted to encourage dioceses to work in new and creative ways to increase lay and ordained vocations.

“This isn’t about survival, somehow bringing in enough people and enough cash to ensure we can keep going. It isn’t about doing the box-ticking exercise which someone ‘out there’ has told us that we must do,” Rev Wharton said.

“It isn’t about doing more and more ‘stuff’ or finding just the right magic bullet approach that unlocks the success we’ve been looking for.

“Rather, this is about a community of believers coming together to dream dreams with God about what might be possible in his perfect plan for their future.”
Revitalising the parish for mission:

That this Synod:

a. welcome the emphasis in the Church of England's Vision and Strategy for the 2020s on the revitalisation of the parish for mission as one of the six 'bold outcomes';

b. affirm the parish system as the central component of the mixed ecology as we seek to offer a living and contextually-appropriate expression of church for every person in England, and a vital means of fulfilling our calling to become younger and more diverse;

c. note the research presented in 'From Anecdote to Evidence' as well as other recent research which contributes to our understanding of the factors supporting church growth and vitality;

d. request the Archbishops' Council bring a report collating the research that has already been in place to a future group of sessions so that the Synod might have greater confidence that church growth and revitalisation alongside other mixed ecologies of church are taking place in line with our six bold outcomes, enabling local churches to develop and implement local mission plans;

e. welcome the Church's commitment to increasing the numbers of ordinands, as well as increasing emphasis on lay ministry and the expansion of Licenced Lay Ministers in many dioceses;

f. encourage dioceses to work in new and creative ways to increase lay and ordained vocations;

g. encourage each parish and diocese support a process of local missional discernment (Mission Action Planning) to enable greater effectiveness in parochial mission and put a plan in place to meet the discerned missional outcomes to be reviewed annually.