

## Waban Packet: Question # 2

### WABAN QUESTION TWO ANSWERS:

#### Why have you stayed?

### Comprehensive Summary Statement

Below is a comprehensive summary statement synthesizing the material emerging from the responses to **“Why have you stayed?”**

Members stay at the Union Church in Waban because it has become more than a place of worship; it has become a lived community of belonging, grounding, and shared purpose.

While many first arrived seeking children’s programming, mission engagement, or inclusive theology, they remain because of the depth of relationships formed. The church functions as extended family — a place where people are seen, supported through crisis, invited into leadership, and woven into multigenerational bonds. Members describe being cared for in illness, grief, weddings, disability, aging, and life transitions. Vulnerability is possible here in ways that feel distinct from work, school, or civic organizations.

Mission work — especially Nicaragua — is not peripheral but central. It embodies a theology of “praying with our feet,” allowing members to live their faith collectively. The church amplifies individual desire to do good into communal impact, reinforcing both purpose and connection.

Leadership matters deeply. Pastors are remembered not only for sermons, but for personal outreach, compassionate care, intellectual honesty, and theological openness. Scripture is explored rather than imposed. Doubt is welcomed rather than corrected. The tone is inclusive without being vague — grounded in the love of Jesus while allowing broad spiritual exploration.

Music, particularly choir participation, serves as a profound spiritual anchor for many. Sunday worship offers a grounding hour of contemplation, presence, and reset in otherwise fragmented lives.

Members stay not because the church is flawless, but because it is evolving, reflective of its people, and worthy of investment. Many feel a sense of stewardship — an unfinished project they are responsible for helping to shape. Even those who wrestle with aspects of doctrine or direction remain committed to the church's core mission and community.

In essence, people stay because this church provides what few other institutions do simultaneously:

a place to belong deeply, serve meaningfully, question honestly, grow spiritually, and be cared for personally — all within a community committed to living love in action.

It is, for many, home.

## Quotable Quotes

I was very engaged, but I haven't been recently. So I was very engaged because I liked it and I enjoyed it and the people I loved and the leadership. But lately I'm not engaged because I'm taking a break. Well, the leadership, the people, just feeling like a strong sense of community. I liked being very involved. Yeah, it just felt like it was a good fit for me at the time.

Early on it was the all comers dinners and the social events and all the great things that a lot of us did together and then we started Java Gents, and that has been just wonderful. And all the Nicaragua trips have been incredible. And in each one of those, the common thread was, you know, friendship and community, of, you know, the people at church, some of whom are my closest friends. And it's always felt that way. And it's always felt welcoming and open and That's what keeps me coming back, I would say.

I appreciate the leadership that we've had and all the activities that we've engaged in, like Nicaragua I've been to and and the connections with the people I have met at church and some of the committees I've been on. And I also sing in the choir. So that's helped. And I enjoy that. Ringing bells and things like that. So I think it's mainly the congregation that has kept us going. And our kids grew up in the church. So that's it. Great.

I've stayed at the Union Church largely because of the mission work and the folks who join together and do that together. I would just as soon do social justice work with a faith community. I don't want to be a Red Cross or a People for Wellness group. I want it to be faith-based. And so I've been happy to find a faith group that wants to do community service and use, pray with our feet, as well as pray in the pews. And I have found the people in the pews to be great partners in this. And I have found the clergy to be great partners in this. And the combination has encouraged me, encouraged me to stay. And I would say the youth group a long time ago when my kids were that age also encouraged me to stay.

Because of the people, the mix of the people and also with regard to the mission work, the mission work in Nicaragua and otherwise, it was something that I was interested in and supported and made me feel good that we were doing good works. And that's why I stayed.

It's the people and the mission work. I've been, I've really appreciated being invited to participate in the family aid local mission work and that has felt incredibly meaningful at a time when I think I'm grasping for meaning.

I've stayed for a sense of community. And the community is sort of a shared purpose. I value that tremendously. I always have and it has made me more intentional about it because I've been drawn to people who have the same sense of, a purpose or mission or the like. So I think here as a faith community, you know, to be sort of open to a lot of different perspectives and have a sort of sense of purpose. I have a very strong connection to community people, you know, families with kids with disabilities, something that's very sort of near and dear to me. And so the connections I have with people who, you know, with different walks of life, but they have kids with significant disabilities are sort of involved with them. I think same thing here. I mean, I really enjoy greatly the people, just generally, you know, something like Java Gents really enjoy that group, those people, but also because we have a, you know, a common bond and a shared sort of purpose. And I also feel like I would like to sort of stay sort of involved, you know, committed to a church family, particularly when it's going through a transition time, sort of dig in and help, you know, help shape it going forward.

I have never been in a church community that is as welcoming, as inclusive, as non-judgmental, as mission-minded, as intellectual, I would say. I mean, and not in a scholarly way. I mean, we don't have sermons that are scholarly sermons necessarily, but just the people are caring and considerate and want to live life the way Jesus taught us to live. And without the sort of strictures of formality, which I had experienced in my previous churches. This felt like it was just a different community altogether. The church does seem to reflect the people that are in it at the moment. But also, I mean, maybe it's because the church members picked the pastor, but we had the same experience with Pastor Stacy and Pastor Amy. I've never met religious leaders so compassionate and caring and friendly, and I think it's non-judgmental. I mean, I really love the fact that you could go into church and absolutely be comfortable with just letting the service wash over you if you wanted, or you could get really involved and sing your heart out. There

was no, you know, there was no, how can I say it? Yeah, I mean, no judgment about your participation. And then the second thing, I think, is the mission. I mean, we got involved in the Nicaragua trip early on, and then I was on the Nica committee as well. So that's been a big part of why we've stayed. We feel like this church really does want to do good, and they want to live the teachings of Jesus. And for me, that is the best part of being in a religious community. So that's why we've stayed.

We stayed for many years because we really wanted to raise our kids in the church. And we wanted to show them that there is love in the world that they can connect with and that they're cared about. And it was also just fun for them to be at church. And it was a way to organize our lives in a way that gave us a chance to be with other people and get outside of our little bubble of everyday stress and grind. So then COVID came and simultaneously our kids got older and a little less interested in church and also extremely busy with sports. So those pressures really took us away from it, and I went to school again, so that all took us away from church. But the reason why we've come back now is because we've missed everybody at church. And we've also missed having an active connection to a greater meaning in my life. In my life, I've wanted to reconnect with the greater meaning and the sense of God's love. And Megan, Pastor Megan called me this summer and said, how are you doing? And then she said, would you like to talk and connect? So that was a great conversation. And then I went to Bible study. And so there's been a series of re-immersion steps. And I went to a workshop 1 Saturday about mapping my spiritual life. So the church has offered like a series of micro steps to help me get back in the habit and to also reconnect with God's love and community.

Why I have stayed. Okay, a couple of thoughts. So it's less about the kids for me now. They've gotten older, they're off at college actually. So although I'm hoping to drag them back for Christmas Eve service. I've always liked that, like, you know, there was an open forum for just sharing stuff that was on your mind, whether it was something you were worried about, something you were grateful for, something you were relieved about. I don't speak every time I go to church, but I love that that's there and that's, I think that's a really nice feature. Secondly, I'm a big fan of coffee hour after service. I like the service for sure. I like to lean in, get my singing in, but very big fan of, you know, it's like it's not just about sort of the prayers and the sermon and the hymns, you know, that we actually can check in with each other and That's been, that's been really, really nice. And then I guess lastly, just knowing that there is, if you need it, there's the ability to sort of reach out to your pastor to sort of talk about stuff in a more sort of, deep way

one-on-one. Not that I do too much of it, but there were certainly times when I needed that. It did a lot more of that. And don't forget that. So I'll go with those 3.

The church as it is now is not exactly like it was when I was growing up. But as I said earlier, it is a reflection of the people who are part of it at any given time. And one of the things that I really do like about being part of a body like this is that I'm only one person, and I feel like I can't do that much good in the world. And you can do so much more good when you're part of a group like in a church. And that is where I really feel it's making a difference. I had a suggestion for something that we could do. And we just kind of threw it out there and it's like, okay, and we did it. It's not anything formal. It's not anything ongoing But I think something about being heard. I think you can make a suggestion. You can say something about something that's happening and it can take on a life of its own. But I agree that during the service you can, you know, ask for a prayer or you can say how you're grateful for something and you feel like you really are heard. So those are a couple of the things that I think are important.

So this time, I am staying for a few reasons. One is that I sing in the choir, and that's a commitment that's important to me for a variety of reasons. One is I think it's an important commitment to the church. But more importantly, I really enjoy the act of singing in a group, and that element of worshiping through song has become increasingly important to me. I can't imagine going to a church where I didn't, where I don't sing in the choir anymore. I've done that in the past. And it's a great experience, but the choir is very important to me. I also have stayed because the people are fascinating and all ages and all different kinds of expertise and interests. There's always somebody interesting to talk to and something interesting to think about. And it's important to me to be able to spend time with smart people who are thoughtful about the way they're living their lives. Because for me, one of the most important things about going to church on a regular basis is that reminder that we're not alone and that we are living in a world that needs us to live as Jesus taught people to live. And that reminder to stay faithful to loving one another. And that's been for the last 10 years, an extremely important part of why I continue to come to church for that reminder that I can live my life every day at work as a Christian without ever saying to anybody, I'm Christian, you should come to my church. But just by the way I include people in decisions and the decisions that I make at work, that makes a difference. And so that's why I've stayed.

I've stayed partly because when I was in college, I tried a whole bunch of different churches, including a UCC church, and none of them felt right. And I just enjoyed coming back to Union Church. There was just something about this community where I was like, I kept comparing it, comparing other things I visited to this church. And I didn't like them as much. The other reasons I stayed was because I was involved with the Nicaragua mission and I still technically am. And so just being connected to that and the people involved in that and those connections are important to me. One of the things that means a lot to me at this church is the people, just the connections, the relationships. It took me a long time to be able to stay still throughout a whole church service. I was like antsy, tired. I was just like, I cannot do this. And I was able to go and be a Sunday school teacher for many years till I kind of got that out of my system and learned how to sit still for an hour. The pastors that we have had over the last ...the relationships and the warmth and their model of being pastors was really helpful and I appreciated it. And I learned a lot from them. And so kind of that's why I am still, as much as I can.

Being welcomed as part of the deacons. A few years. Ever since I joined, in fact. That's one of the reasons I have been staying as well. A couple other parts, all the ministers they have, which are all great. Being a part of the Java Gents. And then the last reason is the church being really inclusive.

The reasons we've stayed have in part been the same reasons that drew us here. The openness, welcoming community, despite, whatever we may be going through or I may be going through at the time. All of that promise has held true. I think the things that I initially saw in the church I have found to be true. What has really kept me there is the community, the other people. I say that, but also the ministers that have been hired while we've been there have also been a huge piece because that is actually why we left our old church. The hiring of first Amy was huge for us at that time, having the four young kids. That was an enormous piece of our staying was her ability to minister to the children and connect with them. Now that the hiring of Megan has been, I think, a wonderful addition and that kind of, I don't know how to say it exactly, but has kind of reinforced our connection to the church. And I say that having not really been yet this fall, but we still feel connected. You know, we're at a point in our lives where we're traveling a lot and gone a lot of weekends right now, but we still feel we have the church as our home.

I think even in the times where we've, you know, been members, there have been times where we have questioned whether it's still the right place for us for a variety of reasons. I feel very committed to the community and life has its ups and downs and, families expand and contract and change. And I just feel it's very important to continue to be there and contribute. leadership and community and openness, because, for me, that's a lot of what living into Christianity or spirituality is. I have a very kind of practical application of that in my life, or I try to. And staying at UCW helps me live into that and practice it. I always find, even when I'm feeling questioning or kind of discouraged about what's happening or not happening at the church, I find it's a really useful exercise for me spiritually to go there and just try to have an open mind and heart. And I always kind of feel reconnected and re-energized. And that's been a really important grounding exercise for me that I, that's a very personal reason. And I just have great, I have, I so deeply believe in the mission of this church, even though there have been times where I'm not sure spiritually or, from a Christian doctrine standpoint, I'm aligned. But I so deeply believe in what UCW's mission is.

The whole aligned with Christian doctrine, that's a whole thing that I find fascinating. I love learning about this stuff. I love listening to the pastor give their sermon, the readings. I love exploring this sort of stuff and hearing these things and trying to figure out how they apply to our life. I think it's really important. In fact, I would love to have some kind of other session. And I know that it's out there where we just talk about this stuff and how it applies to our life. But I love the people that are there, even if I don't talk to them. There's a couple of folks that I watch all the time and they have their arms around each other as they're singing. And I love learning about the mission. I'd love to do that sometime. To me, it's all about the family or the feeling that's there. It's just being present in the system. And in the moment. I love the choir. I love the music. I hope we get that set. But to me, it's just about the feeling that's there is very, very important. One of the things is I'm a little bit more on the shy side, and I can assure you there's people out there that want this sort of place and to feel welcome and to be able to express themselves. And that, to me, is very important.

I stay because of my family here. I stay because of that. I love the line, the inclusive love of Jesus that Megan uses every week very much. I listen to her and she's really rabbinic in the way she preaches and opens the scriptures and explores them from ways people don't do. I don't have the sense of community because I'm not there and I really miss that much, It's the way Megan unlocks the scriptures, the doctrines, without

being forceful about it, the inclusive love of Jesus, the presence of my family there. That's why I stay.

The people. The folks that were the cohort, particularly that I was raising the kids with were just an incredible group of other parents and other kids. And I got very involved in creating, we didn't have a youth ministry before, and we created one, and it was just awesome for our kids. While sad about Stacy leaving, I was actually part of the process for recruiting Megan, and I was really excited about Megan for sort of charting in, you know, the next course. The fact that there was a minister who was thinking big and who wanted to kind of go big was exciting to me.

I would say people, but more specifically, personal care and attention. You know, we had a pastor who without even being, without being asked, came in and visited me when I was recovering from some serious surgery. She arranged for my wife and I to be married here in the middle of COVID. And what was striking is when we walked out the door of the church, she had organized all kinds of people in cars to honk and wave posters. And so that means a lot.

I'd say the people and the pastors, the messages. I like listening to the messages. I find that in the world we live in, it's really important to have someone help frame the big picture besides myself. Like I read things and I write my journal and all that jazz. But when somebody else is connecting me to a bigger idea, And that bigger idea extends to all these other people who care about similar things, not always the same. That to me is inspiring. The individual relationships I have with all the people here are wonderful people who've also changed my life. You let people in and your life has changed. People want to know what happens to my daughter and people care. When I was laid up last spring, you know, people here came and helped me. You know, I had a surgery and people volunteered to come bring me food while I was recovering. And I like, That's what church is for. So I think, it's a great community.

We have been here 15 years, and we actually tried to leave. After five years, the first five years we were here, I went on to other things in my work life. And so we thought, great, we don't need to drive to Newton to go to church anymore. So we started to look at other churches. But we realized how invested the kids were in their connections here and how invested we were in our connections here. And so instead of leaving, we

actually ended up finally joining the church. And we have so appreciated the pastors, the different pastors we've had here, all of them, and the focus on mission and the inclusion that is in this church. And I think there was another opportunity for us to leave when we became empty nesters very recently. We're like, maybe we should just go to church in Boston somewhere. But we didn't really consider it because I think even though our kids have left, we realize how connected they still are to the church and how people here still maintain connections with them, people of different ages. Older people at this church maintain connections with my kids independently of me and my husband. And my husband and I are still actually very connected to the church too. So thus, we are here.

I've stayed because of the people. But the first thing that came to my mind. The people I feel connected to, the people that both socially and is an opportunity to work with them. I'm looking around the table and thinking of lots of opportunities I've had to work with people here. And it's a feeling of being a belonging to something bigger than your local, your family and your individual relationships. It's just, yep, the feeling of belonging. I think I've also stayed because I've seen this church be a place that with a background in social work, I can do kind of "volunteer social work" in a way that's really fulfilling to me. So I see the church as providing lots of opportunities, both locally and internationally, to get involved with mission work. I also see it as a sanctuary on Sunday mornings to have that quiet, contemplative hour and I feel I always feel better when I leave than when I came in. I feel nourished. I feel connected to people. So it's kind of a no-brainer why I've stayed.

In some ways, it feels silly to answer this question because we've only just gotten here, but it feels quite fresh in my mind. The first time we went, the question of, are you going to go back again the next week? And then are you going to go back again the third week? And I think we decided to come back for a lot of the reasons that brought us here. We were looking for these things, and it feels like the church has provided them. I think the people in the community have been really welcoming. There were lots of opportunities to, get involved to the extent that, we wanted to get involved pretty much right away. And it feels like, too, although, there are a lot of people who, don't necessarily like are not the same age or less or have different backgrounds or have kids and we don't have kids, it does feel like the more that I learn about all the people in this church, I'm like, oh yeah, like these are our people. Like there are a lot of like shared values here, even while there are some, things that, are different amongst all of us. And I think that has felt really good to discover like all of these people who really care about

the people around them and I think are invested in these questions of how we can care for the people in this community and also the people who are outside this community who maybe don't have as many resources as we do. And I mean, I'll say too, I think just on an even more sort of granular level, after we came to church, I think once or twice, Megan reached out and we went to coffee and, I think she did a really good job of sort of like making it feel like it mattered that we were here and connecting us to other new people in the community. And that too has, I think, like helped us to, feel more invested to the extent that actually this past summer, I was offered a job somewhere else and we thought about moving and we one of the sort of like things in the stay column was, oh, we just got involved in this great church. And we did obviously end up staying for that and a bunch of other reasons.

I think I would say that I stay largely for the people and for the opportunities for involvement in mission work both locally, and I was very involved and am still very involved in Nicaragua. I've gone several times. So those are the primary reasons that I've stayed. I've asked myself, because many of the people that I was here with 30 or 40 30 years ago are no longer here. And I've asked myself, why am I staying? And I've sometimes been discouraged. Sometimes church feels more like a meeting with too much talking and not enough contemplative time for me. But the overarching feeling is that the people that I've known for decades now and I've been involved with for decades. I enjoy the people here. I enjoy the work I do outside the church. And I, for the most part, have enjoyed the choir. I've continued because I believe that the church is a place that I can help build and make stronger.

Initially, we stayed for the kids in Sunday school. We also stayed for the people and the connections we made. I think over time, as I took on different leadership roles in mission and council, also a sense of responsibility that I kind of helped try to get this church in the place where it is now, and it's an unfinished project, I realized, and it's probably true wherever you are, but I feel also a deep sense of responsibility to this church. And also faith. I love the preaching at this church. I think we've had excellent pastors and we continue to find great pastors. I think it's open. It is still a pretty big tent of people that we have here. And I come away from listening to a sermon, feeling nervous by it. So those, I think, are the main reasons why I stay.

I will say, so part of the reason I felt immediately comfortable here is I'm a UCC minister's kid and walking through the door, it felt like home. And my father was a huge

social activist, so the social activism of this church felt comfortable too. My partner was raised in a very traditional Irish Catholic home, going to Catholic schools from kindergarten through college. That was a must. And when we met, we met because we had faith in action. We both lived out our faith, and faith in action, that was a huge commonality. Finding a place where we both felt comfortable was important to us. And this church really does have a diverse group of people from different backgrounds. We've been to a lot of churches, as we've sampled through the years, and ironically, not all churches are welcoming to people with disabilities. We're very close to the people. Many of the people feel like family. We've known them through the years. We don't live near family. And so that was very important to us. Particularly, not only do we not live near family, but our parents died at early ages. And so the people in the church were grandparents for my kids and mean the world to them and go to their plays and their sporting events. And we're known and we're seen. And it's close to home.

Really loving the leadership and feeling from Stacy on through feeling like they gave deep and wise leadership ranging from in the formal nature of a sermon to individual exchange and time. So that felt enriching for me personally. We stayed. I stayed because our kids connected with other kids. And as a family, we connected with other families. That was important part of it. I think the mission piece and the mission travel was another reason to stay, both for the service component of that and also for the just the real, really deep fun of going and doing those, those trips with other people. And then maybe last, the last reason why I stayed was that there seemed to be a nice sort of inclusivity around people's orientation, their depth of their their degree of faith, or their questioning of faith, inclusivity around wide range of political perspectives, it didn't feel or oriented toward a specific worldview. It felt open and inclusive.

I've been treated with such kindness and love that it totally overwhelms me. I came in at a time that I needed a lot of support, which I wasn't getting from my family and so forth. So I started by joining a group. It was the women's group, Wellspring, and then on, did a little more and more, until I became more immersed in the life of the church, and it's just been wonderful.

Perhaps because we're family. I think I tend to be a little sentimental. I have a lot of memories here. It's always been a part of my life. I don't know what more I can say.

I feel like at this point I'm half one foot in the door and out of the door, and that's for several reasons, but I think that the reason I'm here, the reason I've stayed, is because of the friendships and the community, and because I think that what the church does, and I mean Union Church in Waban , I think they do really good work, and it's an amazing community of people. So I think that for me, I'm trying to stay in because of that sense of community and the focus on social justice. And when I say community and the friendships, I think it's a church is a unique place where you can allow yourself to be vulnerable, and when individuals allow themselves to be vulnerable, that provides a closeness. When people share the pain that they're going through, it's a little different than a work relationship, and so for me, it's, it's important to be there to listen and support other people, but also, you know, feel like I have a place where I could go if, heaven forbid, there was a disaster in my life.

I've stayed for number of reasons. The the one principal reason is that this church tends to ground me in a way that nothing else in my life does, and a lot of it for me is through the music, being in the choir, etc. That's a big part of my spiritual journey and so and particularly given the open nature of this church, even though I was kind of raised in a pretty doctrinaire UCC upbringing, the fact that this brings a broad segment of people to this community makes it kind of a fascinating place to be. The Nicaragua trips have been very meaningful for me, that all of the other work that's been done in the past in various capacities, and just a lot of the localized work we do with, you know, GBIO and other other organizations, there's just a lot of great social justice that's lived through this body that's really hard to do in other settings. So that's what brings me back.

It's a good question right now, because we moved only 15 minutes away, and in some ways, to move to a new community, to join a church is to get involved in the community. So it's been a deliberate choice not to do that and stay so that's important in terms of my own story, and I think it's because I really love this church. I think it's a wonderful it's a wonderful community of people, interesting, committed, people who care, who are who are also serious about the spiritual life or the connection. I think the word I have is like kind of grounding, place to really be grounded, and a community of really shared values in terms of social justice, in terms of being in the community the the openness, clear openness, to people being able to be anywhere they are, terms of belief or not belief or whatever, really important to me too. It is a wide welcome is extended in the words, but I think that is also true in the experience. I think it's one of the strongest in terms of Leadership, in terms of a meaningful worship, terms of really pointing beyond itself in terms of its involvement and internationally, in terms of Nicaragua and other

things in the past and local. I mean, it embodies, at least in good part, what I what I hope a church would embody, not perfect by any stretch, but good enough for sure.