

Waban Packet: Question # 3

Where would you like to see this church and its ministries in three to five years from now?

Comprehensive Summary Statement

Below is a **comprehensive summary statement** that captures the collective voice and direction.

The congregation expresses deep gratitude for the strong foundation currently in place—mission-centered, inclusive, relational, and spiritually thoughtful—and a shared conviction that this is not a time for reinvention so much as intentional expansion.

Across perspectives, there is a consistent call for growth, particularly in welcoming young families, children, and youth, not merely to increase numbers but to ensure vitality, sustainability, and intergenerational continuity. Members want the church to build on its strengths—authentic mission partnerships, meaningful worship, thoughtful preaching, and genuine community—while investing urgently and strategically in outreach, staffing stability, and financial resilience.

The community seeks growth that is organic rather than programmatic, invitational rather than evangelistic, and inclusive of those who may be uncertain about traditional Christian doctrine. There is a desire for spiritual depth that engages contemporary cultural realities, addresses urgent social concerns (including climate, justice, and inclusion), and speaks in language broad enough to welcome seekers while remaining rooted in the Christian tradition.

At its heart, the vision is for a church that is vibrant, diverse, intergenerational, financially secure, and courageously relevant—one that strengthens existing relationships while widening the circle; that sustains its mission impact locally and globally; and that acts with both urgency and hope to ensure a faithful, dynamic future.

Quotable Quotes

I'm noticing a lot of new faces and a lot of new kids, which is really wonderful. So I think one of the things would be to encourage that. Also, I mean, I love everything that we do and the things that I'm involved in. Sometimes it feels like we're spread a little too thin. And I think that's just probably because of the numbers that we have and being a small congregation. I think that also allows us to be a little more nimble and try some new things that might be a little more difficult with the larger congregation. I think anything we can do to encourage more youth, but take care of our our elders as well and take care of each other. It feels kind of like what we're doing already. And I think Megan's the perfect leader to help us get there and do that. I very much value the diversity of our community and I think we've done done a pretty good job at that as well. I kind of like I like where we seem to be going under Megan's leadership.

I'd like to see more people join and more children and youth and possibly more people in the choir. And I think Megan is going in the right direction, hopefully to get more people with the help of others, in with the help of the congregation, hopefully. Well, hopefully we're getting a permanent music minister. So hopefully we'll be getting somebody permanent for that position. And maybe they can attract more people.

I hope the church does grow and gets more families. And I don't know what that would take actually. We could be better at diversity and outreach of more communities and peoples. We seem to be very Wabanitish and so more support with mission maybe of some sort. I don't think they get a lot of financial support. I don't know how that really works because I'm not part of it, but I know they don't get a lot of financial support. And I think, you know, reaching out to other communities that are not like our community being more open to that.

I would like to see the church grow intergenerationally, have sort of younger families with children and be sort of a place for welcoming for that. And not even just with the young children. I really enjoyed it when there were, you know, children, then, you know, young adults and the like. I thought that was a great sort of gift. The church you know, also be more, maybe attract more sort of families with members with disabilities. I think

we have a lot of sort of welcoming, you know, with that, and I think find a sort of welcoming place. For those families. I'd like to see it more stable as far as, staffing and things like that, more financially secure. Also, supporting, you know, different people and, you know, good worship services and and things like that.

Well, I would say, just in short, that continuing to doing what they're doing, That's all I can say.

I think building on our strengths, which is the community and the mission work that we do. I'm not in a season of life where I can participate in the Nicaragua mission, but that's one of the things that drew us to the church, as opposed to other churches that were talking the talk about social justice and helping people in need. The Union Church in Waban was really walking the walk in terms of helping people and developing long-lasting, committed relationships, both with our sister church in Nicaragua, but I've also seen that building on the FamilyAid side. And I deeply respect that. I think also from like an anthropological perspective, that we're not just plopping in and trying to fix something and tie a bow on it and then leave, but that the church is really committed to sustained relationships and improvements in quality of life and aid for people in need. I would love to see the new disability pews used. I feel like sometimes I use them because no one else is using them, but used by people who wouldn't be able to use the rest of the pews. I would love for my children to have friends and partners and buddies in Sunday school. I think trying to strike that balance between outreach and, but I will say one thing that I would not like to us, what direction I would not like us to go in is evangelism. And like that's one of the reasons why I chose this church was that I think it's open but not pressuring. I'd love to see more young families to intermix with sort of as the average age of the church gets older. I have really admired the number of young people who I would say young, but like high school and college age. It seemed like there was sort of, there must have been a golden age of children coming through Sunday school. And it shows in the number of kids who come back during school vacations and are connected not only to each other, but to other members of the church. That's been really beautiful to see. And I don't know how to recreate that for the next generation, but gosh, would I love my kids to have something, a connection like that to the church.

I'd like us to consider what we want for the next three years immediately and next year and the year after. I wish this had happened last year. And the fact that it's happening

this year makes me feel even more urgent. Makes me feel these questions need to be more urgent. I would also say that in the future, I would like to see an urgency about growing and more children and more youth and more people, because in order to do the things that I think a church should be doing, and the two pillars, the two things I would think the church should be doing would be, one, the mission work, local and international. and the second being care and concern of each other. I'm hopeful that this envisioning project process will result in initiatives right away, that we will throw money at the correct initiatives. and that the church will continue to show how the Bible or God or the Spirit, however you want to frame it, does guide us in this time, this horrible, horrible time that we can't even describe. It's such a difficult time, but I'm counting on the church to both support us, each other at this time, and also that the service itself, the sermon itself, the prayers themselves will provide guidance at this time and in the near future.

Where do I want the church to go in three to five years? I like where it is right now. I mean, there's a lot of things I like about it, so I like that it's still very much mission and outreach focused. I guess what I'm thinking about is just kind of also thinking about how fast now the world changes and just kind of hoping that the church can kind of live, kind of live in, live in, we already have the right values and the right theology type things. And it's really just how do we kind of keep up with those, with things that are happening in the world, to also kind of stay relevant for people. And just kind of be the, continue to be the leader of social justice and mission and service that we have been. And so it's hard for me to know what that, to give like actual names because I don't know what's going to happen, what next three to five years are going to look like. It's hard to know what tomorrow is going to look like right now. But just I would say I would, I guess in one short sentence would be just to hopefully be just as committed to kind of that service-oriented stuff that we do so well.

I would want the church to still be open and alive and feeling like we're growing. Because when more people come into a community, that's more energy, that's more ideas, that's more love, that's more fun, that's more meaningful in that when people start to share, then there's a ripple effect. And the more we see others sharing and reaching for goodness and love and connection, then that might help us to go even deeper within our own selves and to ripple it out to the community and then back to our families. So it's just such a virtuous cycle when there's a community that feels like it's, you know, somewhat healthy, somewhat growing, somewhat relevant. So literally, I don't really know the status of where we're at with all the measures, but I just really hope that we

can stay alive and continue growing, have a sense of vitality, service. And for me, maybe a common denominator in my thoughts is like this word of openness. I do feel that I would like to be a part of a spiritual community that sends a message to the community and to the world that we are open. And and that we want to help people connect and have peace and find healing in these hurtful times, but also all times. So I guess maybe if we can, for me, if I could be a part of a community that's finding ways to sort of be more available more times each week to different kinds of people, whether they be young people looking for music or old people looking for, I'm old, looking for like, small group discussions, yoga, stretching, weekly concerts. I think that we have resources that we can maybe invest in stuff like that if it were helpful to the mission. So anyway. But I say it all very humbly because I've not been around. So I just appreciate the chance to sort of offer my thoughts. It's nice to be heard. That's democracy and that's love.

I think that I would like the church to be as it is, but more so. I think that one of the things that we really need is growth. There are some challenges. that we've faced, COVID, an aging congregation, some of the long-term members that we've lost. So just growth in that way, but also to bring in more people, more ideas, more energy, and to keep going with the outreach and the involvement and the social justice issues, things like that, to continue with those things, but to grow them even more.

I feel like we've got a really good thing going. And, you know, I want to sort of acknowledge that, right? I think the new pastor search was super thorough and they did a great job. And Megan's really settled in super well. That's not an easy thing to do. I think too, though, that, the church has capacity for more, whether it's the physical building on a Sunday. I know Sunday mass or Sunday church attendance isn't the be all and end all that it used to be. But, you know, there's definitely sort of room to grow, but I would love sort of for growth to happen through sort of thoughtful outreach rather than sort of mass market, marketing campaigns. I think a lot, sort of being, trying to sort of maybe think about a way to organically grow through people that maybe the congregation already knows or being sort of well positioned in potential school systems or, to learn when new people are coming in. And I think that's, that would be helpful, for, not just like bricks and mortar support, financial stuff, but also, idea generation and sort of, different ways of looking at things. I would like, I would like the church to continue to be okay with different levels of commitment in support of the church. I think that if you're going to grow and try to be more exclusive, I think you have to be flexible. And I love the fact that there's lots and lots of things one can do in support of the church, but I also

think it's nice that you can let the service wash over you. And that's okay too. And I think we're doing a ton of stuff right in terms of inclusivity and thoughtfulness. They'd be my things I'd hope we could sort of maintain and build and grow.

I would like to see the church maintain its focus on mission. That's very important to me. I think acknowledging that there's a lot of life in the church that happens outside of Sunday worship is really important. So I hope that we can find ways to incorporate that vitality that's happening outside of worship so that people feel comfortable with that, right? That knowing that you work in mission and you're working with a third of the people that you're working with don't necessarily come to church on Sunday, but they're an important part of the church. And I do think persistence is important. I left the church for a variety of reasons, but a faithful community stayed, and I'm so grateful to the people that kept the church around for me to come back to. That's super important. So finding that the way to be persistent, I think growing numbers on Sundays would be great. I think growing numbers in mission is even more important. And getting our message, I'd like to see us providing our message to each other, to a broader audience. And that doesn't necessarily mean large impersonal marketing campaigns, but what are those things we could be saying to our neighbors that would help them feel better about life in the way that Union Church makes us feel better about life. There's a need for that. So I'm not an evangelist, but people in my life know that church is important to me and ask for prayers and that I've never had that happen to me in my life. And I think that's a really cool thing. So how do we help propagate that sense that the Union Church has something going on, the Union Church prayers are meaningful, the Union Church's mission is meaningful.

I would hate to see the church lose its focus on inclusivity, mission, the community aspect. I mean, I've been in churches where I've felt like I'm being guilted the whole time I'm sitting there. And I do not feel that way in this church. So I don't want I mean, I know that we wouldn't have picked a pastor like that, but just to keep the leadership in line or not in line, but with the same groupthink, if you will, or the thinking of the congregation, I think has been very important. I don't think we can really afford to grow the way that everyone's talking about here tonight, if we don't have a children's program and a great children's pastor. I do think that that's something we should put some effort into in the next year so that in the next three years we have a strong children's program. I've liked the fact that that with the children that have gone through that, that confirmation process, not all of them have come out, you know, the same way. They don't feel like they're sort of brainwashed into saying something that they don't really believe that. I

really I really like the fact that that people are able to get to where they need to be or want to be on their own. I mean, there's another thing that that we hear about on Sunday is that wherever you are in your journey, you're welcome in this church. And not everybody gets to the same place at the same rate. And I would hope the church could continue with that philosophy.

I hope we find a replacement for both Amy and Mijin really soon. But I want everything else to stay. And actually, the financial stuff. I'd like to see the financial stuff get better or get better.

I would love to see the size and diversity of the congregation grow, regrow. I would love to see more kids. as well as more single people who feel single for whatever reason, feel comfortable. I've always wanted that. I've always wanted UCW to be welcoming for all kinds of people. So just more diversity, more people. I would love to see from a spiritual standpoint, I feel that there's a piece of what comes into the service in terms of religious teachings and sermons. I have felt a little bit that the speaking to the folks who are not sure they believe in Jesus or the Bible or Christian doctrine, more acknowledged, more welcomed in a more direct way. I would love to, I would love for us to have our current leadership structure a little kind of more engaged. So a little bit more together, a little bit more communicative. And I'd like for us to be less ambitious on our strategic goals year by year, but have more of an impact in a fewer number of initiatives.

I would like to see the message, the vision, the words of this church spread more. I think there's a huge community of people out there that are not sure of where they want to go. They don't know how to find community. They don't know how to find spirituality without being too Jesus-y, without being preached to in a certain way, and to be truly open and welcome. I think that's, we can go all over the world. I think there's a huge portion of people out there just waiting to find that. And then really welcome them in. One of the things I've always wondered is, I see new people all the time in a church, and I'm not sure if they're new or they just come in. And then we go downstairs and everybody talks to each other, they knew each other. I think we can even be more welcoming people and saying, please come downstairs. And then the senior people, welcome, reach out to them. What did you think about it? I think there's some really great outreach that can be done. And I think that's important. I agree. I am not all that Jesusy. I believe in Jesus, but I have some questions about some parts of the whole thing. Because I would really like to have more, what does all this mean in our world to

us and our lives. And not necessarily, and I don't mean to this disrespectfully, but picking apart the Bible, but sort of what it means to us and our lives and stuff like that and our spirituality and how we can live together better as human beings. and as people within with love and that kind of stuff. And to me, I think that's something that would appeal to people on those different, you know, the agnostics, the people that are still searching. That, to me, I think, is an important part of how you can continue to bring people into the fold. Once you get them in, I think you can just do great things.

My hope is that we can continue to grow the congregation, especially the children's program. I feel like just now at the point where we're sort of coming out of the COVID issues, you know, five plus years later. But I feel like there's some momentum swinging back towards people coming back, which makes me hopeful. But I'm really hopeful that as the hiring settles over the next year, hopefully, with the music program and the children's program, and we figure out kind of what our long-term model is going to be for hiring, that we can really start to invest in pulling people into the church. and especially families with young children. And I think in part because that's what drew us to the church. And I think it's so valuable in our society for kids to have a place like Union Church, where they just are, A) not connected through a device, but B), you know, welcome no matter how they present. And so that's sort of my focus. But I think that I mean, I also would say we're not a very Jesus-y family. And I think that being able to hear that message of just living out Christianity in our lives and less focused on the details of maybe the details of the Bible is sort of what would continue to inspire me.

I wish the church was not so all white. I wish we would hire a person of color. Maybe that's most of my life has been where I've been one of the few white people around and I miss the diversity of race and class. in the church. I wish it was more diverse. Like I said, that would be my wish for five years from now.

I would like to see us with 250 members, 125 pledging units, three full-time pastors, full-time musician director, having a very significant impact on Newton and youth, in particular in Newton, and creating a safe space for kids that's non-competitive because there's very little accessible to them that's non-competitive. Tackling issues of affordable housing and homelessness, because I think that's a big passion area in the church. and continuing to build our relationships in Central America, Nicaragua particularly, and continuing to build on that ministry. And I'd like to see us tackling this issue of inclusion from even more lenses than I think we do. I don't think we talk about economic inclusion

nearly enough, and I don't think we address the fact that we live in an increasingly anti-Semitic world in a very Jewish town? And what's our role in that? It's generally not Jewish. And what's the role we can do? And what could we be doing with our brothers and sisters at the temples more?

I would like to see us as vibrant with a place where we can be a place for truth in the Christian tradition that is relevant to a lot of people who don't feel that church is relevant to them right now. And I don't have a specific vision of what this looks like, but I have a feeling. It's a feeling of something that is very outside the box. That could be, not necessarily, one thing, a vision that attracts me is not being shackled by our building. So it might be that we are still in our building, but we are in our building as renters of someone else who owns our building. Or it might be that, ironically, the Starbucks across the street is closing in a week or two as part of all these Starbucks that are closing. And I believe the history is our congregation started upstairs above the Starbucks. I would love to be in a storefront church that does \$16 million worth of ministry in this world. So I'm willing to think very outside of the box to be this place that is vibrant and relevant in our tradition in the world.

I'd like to see us bigger, because I think there's many things we could do or do more sustainably than we're doing now. I think it's a wonderful congregation, but I think, and I've had a lot of experience with church affairs and I think we're a little on the small side in numbers of people. I am mindful that I don't want to see us lose the personal connection. So how big we get is a question that's on the table, but I think we need to be bigger than we are now.

I think I'd like to see us grow to grow in our faith in action. I think that there are populations in Newton and in the world, in the United States, that we could be reaching out to more. And I think that the energy is there to do such things. But I think we do need probably to reach out more laterally 1st and gather more people. This is a very progressive city. And a lot of people have drifted from church for whatever reason. I was on our recruitment committee at my last church, try to get more people. It's really interesting, though, that you can't just recruit people. The life of a church is what it is. And you have to just share what's happening with that life. I think that's how you get people to come. It's not about, Hey, wanna join a church? It's not that. It's drawing people in to show them the life that's already there. And I think this church has a lot of life and a lot of talents that are going on all the time. And if people knew more about

that, there would be more people here. But I also echo some of the things that have been said. Youth is where it's at. You need to have children to grow a church. We have a very small amount of children. And so I think that the seeds need to be planted and more brought in.

I'd like to see a more universal outlook, not specific to different groups, but more looking into other other things. I'm a longtime student of other philosophies and religions and so forth, and I know that they all have something to offer us, so I'd like to see more of that type of interest.

I'd like to see it grow. I'd like to see I'd like to see us reach out and, you know, really prioritize bringing in more people, more families, younger people. I'd like to see us have confidence that there's a the church will continue and be strong and not have to fear that we're kind of at the declining end of the age curve, and and and not and have people moving out, not being replaced. So I think that should be our priority. I think achieving that probably means really investing and committing to it, and not kind of assuming it'll happen. And it probably means a certain kind of even greater openness, maybe than we've had before, or even greater outreach than we've had before. So that would be the one thing I'd emphasize. It's maybe a little different other elements of our ministries, like, say, our mission work, feels to me like it's it's great the way it is, and if it continued kind of at the same level and pace and variety so different people can get involved to the different degrees that they want. I think that would be great. I think in terms of the theology of it and the sort of services, probably more variety would appeal to me, but I don't feel strongly about that, so I wouldn't emphasize that if that went against the prevailing view.

I'd like to see growth new families, whole families come in. I'd love to see growth at a church, school and the youth group. I'd like to see a youth choir, senior choir. I'd like to see I'm proportional to music. I'd like to see the organ fixed. And the infrastructure of 14 Collins Road, I think before we get into other things as far as what the church does, we can't do much without fixing the church physically. I mean, the organ, the different things that in the church that needs fixing. And then we can, you know, explore, you know, go through our missions and stuff. I'd love to see a senior choir, a youth choir, just to see people have the memories that I've had. You know, have a part of people's lives, build memories, family, community, friends.

I would like the spiritual depth of the community and the betweenness of our relationships deepen that the ground become more prominent of why we're here. And I don't mean more pious. I really mean substantively. People really struggling with what it means to be faithful in today's world to something beyond themselves. I put it that way because I feel like our language is too narrow to draw people. I'm perfectly comfortable ordained, etc, with Christian language, I can make it work for me. Not just work. It's meaningful to me, but I also feel that the let that, that we've got to have got us the church has got to be more responsive to what's happening culturally in order to have a future. I was talking about this with friends, totally outside this process yesterday, and I think the the future of the church really does depend on our capacity to also read the culture right now. And priority would mean to me focus a little bit more focus, but to be careful not in that focus to shut people out, if it's too narrow, or people to get a board. I think I this is funny to say. It's not about growing our church, but it is about we have to be able to attract young families and children. If there's going to be a future, we have to period.

So three to five years from now, it would look like more young families and children, yeah, and I think for that, I think we also need a focus externally, and I would like to become, just to put it boldly, a climate focused church, we are really invested, individually, as families, as a community, to taking care of our common Earth as a focal point. It comes up in worship, comes up in small groups and spiritual life that's across the board, because it is so critical to our world and time, and I think it's the one issue that young people are more attracted to than any right now. But I'm also faithful. I don't think it's just because it's popular by any stretch. I think it's absolutely critical, but it may be our best avenue to to attract,

I'd like to see the church sort of embrace the younger generation in a way that stands into the value of institutions, because the church writ large is shrinking, particularly in New England. We know all the various churches that are shifting and getting smaller. Like climate there are certain issues that are sit resident with a younger generation that may not see it through the lens of faith or institution of church, for example. So I think if we can find ways to sort of we live into it ourselves, but find a ways of inviting folks to come to believe in those institutions. Because, frankly, many of our institutions are at risk at the moment, and there will be people asking the question, what happened? Or why don't I have the institutions? Because so many of the institutions are breaking down. And I think this church has the capacity to stand into that breach, if you will, and

really provide depth of faith or depth of community, you know, things for young people to believe in, such that they can grow. I think all you have to do is look at the two members of our church that just stepped up to be youth ministers. These are, these are kids that were little puppies when I showed up at church right and now here they are, you know, standing into the breach and giving back and so we we have many examples in our in our church, of the success of that kind of thing, but I think we just need to broaden the base a little. I'm not saying grow the church in numbers. I'm just saying grow it in a way that allows for a future for the church, because we are an older church, and there are many of the elders of the church who are doing much of the work, and that needs to be released to a new, you know, leadership capacity over time.

I think the first thing that bubbled up to my brain when you pose the question was we talk a lot about growing the church, but I feel like first and foremost, we need to re-establish the existing connections that we have in the church. I would like to pull people back so that the church is a little bit more robust in every way, in terms of attendance, in terms of what we can manage to do, as has been said, there's a few people carrying a lot of weight, and more people make you know, what is the phrase, many hands make light work. I would like to see that existing connections strengthen. And would like to see more young people attracted to the church, and I think that it's a time when I was having this discussion with somebody else from the church, and they, they said, and I agree, like sometimes in your work environment or elsewhere, it's almost an embarrassment to say, "Yeah, I go to church because organized religion has become this divisive thing in this country for some reason, which it shouldn't be." I would like to see the church moving to a place where young families moving to wellbeing. See it as a welcoming place doing the work of Jesus, which, in my mind, is in contrast to some of the ways that religion is portrayed in the you know, the news.