

Waban Packet: Question # 4

What, in your opinion, will it take to get from where it is today to your vision of its future?

Comprehensive Summary Statement

As with the previous material, below is a comprehensive summary statement capturing the collective voice and direction.

The congregation expresses both gratitude and restlessness.

There is deep appreciation for strong preaching, meaningful worship, inclusive identity, and longstanding mission commitments. Members feel blessed by current leadership and the relational depth of the community. At the same time, there is a shared recognition that the church stands at an inflection point.

Across perspectives, several convictions emerge:

The future requires intentional growth — particularly through children, youth, and young families — not merely to increase numbers but to ensure the transmission of faith, vitality, and long-term sustainability.

Growth will not happen accidentally. It will require strategic clarity, aligned vision, courageous financial investment, and expanded leadership capacity. Many call for a mindset shift from scarcity to abundance — especially in staffing — recognizing that volunteer energy alone cannot carry the future.

Worship must remain strong, spiritually grounded, and compelling. For some, this means strengthening traditional elements; for others, it means experimenting boldly with new formats. Both impulses reflect a shared belief that faith formation, not just community programming, is essential.

Mission remains central to identity — but members want deeper intentionality, sustainability, and focus. Outreach must be both inward (strengthening relationships and small groups) and outward (visibility, public engagement, new access points).

The church's inclusive commitments — particularly around LGBTQ+ affirmation, gendered language, and diversity — are seen as strengths to deepen, not abandon. There is hope for a congregation that becomes visibly more diverse and courageous in welcome.

There is also realism: finances are not robust, energy has dipped post-COVID, and participation patterns have changed. Yet beneath the concern is hope — especially among newer members — that this moment of reflection signals possibility rather than decline.

At heart, the congregation desires a church that is:

- Spiritually grounded and experientially vibrant
- Courageous and aligned in vision
- Invested in leadership capacity
- Deeply relational in small groups
- Focused and intentional in mission
- Inclusive in ways that feel embodied, not performative
- Financially stable through bold stewardship
- Intergenerational and forward-facing

In three to five years, members hope to walk into a space that feels vibrant, energized, and growing — not merely in attendance, but in depth, clarity, and shared purpose.

This is not a congregation looking to survive.

It is a congregation wrestling with how to become fully alive.

Quotable Quotes

This is a tough one. I always say that just more, being more out there in the community, visible in action and deed and appearance, et cetera. Have people see that it's an active, vibrant community. That would be one way. People reaching out to other people, people maybe reaching out to the people who have left the community to see why they've left. That sort of thing. Making changes and in that regard. Your outward mark in the community and, in other areas around the surrounding communities by hosting events and reaching out in other ways, more mission outreach. opportunities, things like that. So that it's sort of like getting your name out there in a way.

I remember a few years ago, we sent cards out to the community at Christmas to try to get people to attend. And just trying to get the word out that we're here.

I think one of the most important things is it can't fall all on Megan. Megan, it definitely helps. Once somebody comes to one of her sermons, and she moves them, that's going to keep them coming back, getting back to question two. I think it's got to be on everyone in the congregation. It's got to be, you know, I've had neighborhood parties where I tell people how wonderful our church is and I try to get them to come. You know, the Christmas trees that used to bring people physically to our church. I thought that was wonderful. You know, when we do the mission work like Nicaragua, it exposes us to so many other people that then come in. I think it's kind of on all of us and doing what we're doing and get the word out that we do want people to come and join. The mission money, to me that that's money well spent on mission to allow us to do some more things and maybe get a little further out of our community. Another thing I remember we did was we did a booth at some of the Newton fairs, that's kind of like getting the word out and just introducing ourselves and, you know, what we think of our church and how they're all welcome. And just hearing that, you know, we're kind of trying to figure out how to get more people in. I also and this is a little bit of a double edged sword, but, you know, we're talking about bringing youth in. I do think us kind of beefing up our Zoom ability for other things might be, I love being in person, but especially with the younger generation that is more likely to get on a Zoom call on a Sunday morning than, go into church. We've lost so many people because they're moving out of the area. If I think a lot of them may have stayed more involved if they had the Zoom, you know, prior to

COVID. I say it's a double edged sword because I think part of the beauty of our church is us all being together. And, you know, it's hard to feel the same kind of connection over Zoom, but I still think it should be available. Overall, I just think it's kind of on each one of us. The other thing is the daycare downstairs. I know some of the congregants have worked on that. Getting those families involved, I've seen a lot of them come. One of our neighbors has started getting involved and hopefully will bring some of her kids. So I think it's kind of on all of us to a certain degree to kind of get there. And the Zoom piece, how we make that any different or better, but to consider that. Ask mission if they're getting what they need, not to minimize anyone else or any other things that we're doing, but I think mission in particular, because I do think mission brings more people in.

I think we need to do more outreach to sustain, to keep the people that are here and to do outreach, to get new people and the more people we have, the more the more that we can do in our mission work and and otherwise. I think that outreach is very important, and we should really prioritize that to keep us viable and effective.

I think for youth and families, investing in a pastor for youth and families is really important. And I hope that the church community and particularly the church community with young children would have a lot of input in the selection process. I also think that there's been a lot of uncertainty. I don't know if that position is going to be open again, if it's being recruited for, if it's posted, or if it's going to be folded into a different part of the budget. That seems like a good way to recruit or to encourage participation from youth and families. This is a repeat of what I said before, but I think investing and solidifying the mission work that UCW already does really well and being thoughtful about if and when we expand that. I think Family Aid and the Nicaragua relationships are really powerful. I think that there are ways to increase community participation in those and to maybe increase the crosstalk of having members of those mission trips or of those mission visits. participate or share their stories throughout the year instead of maybe just the one Sunday after the Nicaragua trip when it felt like there was so much going on that nobody that I couldn't absorb it all. I wonder about weaving that in throughout the year. Money makes things happen. But I think we are very lucky as a church to have a steady income from the tenants of the building as well as from the church community. I think there are hardworking families who are behind that. And so I hope that we lean a reasonable amount on real estate, but not lean overly on real estate, because I think that then generates negative associations between parents of the daycare and the church when I think we want to be creating positive associations. And so I guess that's one other thing I will say, but that I'm personally trying to work on is to build the

relationship between the community at the daycare and the church community to show people how much we're doing and invite them to participate.

I think there's going to have to be a huge commitment if we decide to grow. I think there's going to have to be conversations among different groups like parents of young kids, aging parents, aging people, people who are aging, who happen to be parents too. I think it's going to have to make us think outside of the box and be bold. For instance, when one of our youth said, I think we should have 15 minutes in the pews, and then everybody goes out and does community service for the rest of the hour. Brilliant. Is everybody going to go along with that? I don't know, but I know a lot of youth who would. And if that's one of our goals, maybe we would be that bold. But I think the youth know what they want from a church and may not currently be what we're giving them. I think other out-of-the-box ideas would be merging with other UCC churches because buildings are expensive and every UCC church is struggling with building costs right now. The only way that's going to be easy is if we did more with other UCC churches now. I think we should be partnering, interfaith partnering, of course, which we seem to do more of than within UCC partnering and join when I've joined an anti-Christian nationalism group. I've joined with other local Churches on a number of initiatives. And that's just me as an individual. I think if we set our sights to joining with the other UCC churches on their projects that we like, then when it becomes clear, it's already clear to me that every UCC church has fewer people in the pews and as big as building as they've ever had to support, then we'll have those relationships because we did things with them this year. And we can maybe think about everybody being in one big happy building together in the near future. And lastly, our commitment to young parents of young children needs to be reflected in our hiring. And our transparency about this time of change has got to be better. So we don't know if there is a youth pastor being sought out. We don't know if the choir director has a music committee going. There's been some meetings about our budget and very transparent about our budget. I think we need a strong council as we go forward, strong council with people on it who are active and who are involved and who are in church and who are on committees. And that council could be more transparent about what they're thinking of during this time of transition.

I think the important thing is to not focus so much on chasing after new members and new people and sort of focusing in on, you know, what is meeting the needs of the members that we have. Quoting a senior mentor of mine, the best way to attract new clients is by doing a good job for your current clients. And it's very true. And so I think,

serving the needs of the people in the church is the best way for it to grow. And I think what I look for in a church, I don't think I'm as, as involved in a lot of issues as I should be, but doing a fair bit of, I think, social justice work. And I appreciate that about the church, but I can remember being in one church where big debate of how much of the budget are we going to be giving away to different causes and things like that. And for me, I was thinking, you know what, I write a lot of checks and not as generous as other people, but to a lot of different organizations and whatever, I'm not looking for a conduit for that. I'm looking for a faith-based community. My, you know, my kids don't need another social group. They're involved in school and sports and whatever. You know, I don't need another sort of necessarily like social justice cause. I'm looking for the community. So when we do things like GBIO and this stuff that sort of builds on our community and serves our people when we do the Thanksgiving dinner, we obviously could sort of raise money and sort of buy meals and things like that. And, but that's sort of a great, wonderful sort of community thing for me. I think done great stuff as far as reaching out when it needs to support families and things like that within the church and, you visitations and meals and, you know, and the like. I think focusing in on what sort of the, you know, the core stuff and doing well and servicing our, serving our community very well.

I'm a little bit nervous about sharing this because I don't know what everybody's views are on it. My own background was from less of a patriarchal faith. I would love to see us be a little bit more egalitarian. When I say the covenant, I always say our Father and Mother who art in heaven. And I don't know if that's something that the church community would be open to considering. But I think the thing that held me, that gave me the most pause in joining the church was how patriarchal the faith is. And what drew me to the church, despite that, patriarchal faith was the balance of male and female and gender non-binary leadership that was within it. And then the last thing that I will just add was that I loved the community events, the pool party and the dinner and the pancake breakfast. And I think those are examples of us serving our community that bring us together and and nourish our spirits as well as our stomachs.

I feel like there are things we could do differently and better, but for the vast majority, I think we're doing the right things. I don't know how we encourage people to get more involved, how we get more people in that. That's the big challenge. And I think we've got a bit of a demographic challenge as well. That's kind of kind of going on at the same time with less people being involved in church. And the spiritual piece is extremely important. But having the community piece as just as important might be more of a

more of a hook for new members. Overall, I like our direction. I like our leadership and the community is incredible and what keeps me coming back.

I think Megan is trying to get people to come and doing her best to do that. And I hope that with Amy's departure that we'll get more kids to come or more youth

Having events with the church, people getting together seems to bring, make it more community feeling. And we used to do a real lot of that, you know. retreats, dinners, game nights, you know, it was a lot. We did a lot of things together. And I think that drew people together. I don't think that happens as much now, or it hasn't in the last several years.

I don't know how churches stay alive and grow, except for with everybody's faith and commitment, everybody who's in the family and their faith and commitment and prayers. Organizational development as it relates to church, I don't know. From my work in development in higher education and the nonprofit world, I have been amazed every time I've seen a strong director of development who went ahead and hired staff. And I sort of say that humbly because I don't know what the finances at UCW are, and I wouldn't presume to say anything that's educated because I'm not educated. It is true that a model of investment in staff, even if it seems like times are lean, staff that are well chosen and excellent people, and effective people who can help carry out the mission in strategic and targeted ways. not just, and that could play out in any number of ways. If we want to do more in a thoughtful way to invite others in so that they can grow in their own way, we just need staff. A different model of the staffing we've had, because to echo, we can't rely on our small numbers of a church family to do everything. Like volunteers can't do everything. If you rely mainly on volunteers, key people might get burned out. And at the end of the day, we do need to be replenished as members and as humans because it's been such trying times. Like we do need to have the peace and the quiet of maybe not doing so much. But other people like are fed by that kind of extra work.

We need to be brave and have the courage of our convictions. And I know the church in hiring Amy made an investment, kind of a gamble, an investment in the youth and families. And I think that's an important investment to continue making. We have, over the last few years made a big investment in working with the Riverside families. And I

hope that will continue because that's starting to pay off. We're seeing some young families with kids coming to the church through that Riverside connection. And that is wonderful to see. And so I hope that we will be able to maintain that Riverside connection in some way, shape, or fashion. I hope that we have the courage to listen to what those young families are telling us about what's keeping them coming, even though there are not a ton of kids in the church right now. I think I love the music in the church. I don't think that's what's going to help us sustain our mission. There's nothing in our mission that says we're a church that celebrates excellence in music, right? We're about the human beings. And I hope that, I love hearing the organ. It's a very expensive thing to maintain. I hope that we don't allow ourselves to get, to put money into things that are not directly part of the things that are keeping people staying. It may be that the majority of the church stays because the music program is excellent. If that's the case, let's keep investing in that. I've not heard anyone say that. So I hope that we continue to invest in our in supporting the mission of the church and being intergenerational and being outreach and mission-minded and to remain courageous about that.

I will say music is, the music at UCW, as much as I love that people are able, like I love the fact that the music is the choir of like people who just wouldn't necessarily sing otherwise. And they have that opportunity. I do remember when we hired Amy and we weren't quite sure what was going to happen. I mean, we knew Amy because she had been a student for a couple of years. So we knew she had some really good qualities that we would want in a person. But we didn't know how things would work out, whether we would get this boost in children, which we did end up getting. I think continuing to invest in children is helpful. I agree that I think asking the young, the families of young kids what they like and what they might want to see more of might be a way to kind of get that insight into what we could be doing. I was glad to hear that there was a bridge associate pastor for children, youth, and family. I don't know them, and I don't know what they're doing. So all I can speak in is appreciating that there was someone hired for that. I think just really being able to tell people that we go to this church and why we like it so much, or why it means so much to us, is going to help kind of get that more people, which will equal more, which I don't want to necessarily focus on people, people, people, but like kind of connecting it to getting more of that energy and that excitement and having and trying to help with leadership, preventing leadership burnout.

One thing that I think would be important is for everyone to be educated and have an appreciation of what all goes on because I think a lot of people don't have a clear idea on all that it takes to make the church function. I know several people have said that

they were very sorry to see Amy leave. And I agree. That was very hard because she was the real deal. I mean, but I am sorry that I did not know that she was studying to be a chaplain. It should have been no surprise if everyone had known, she was studying to be a chaplain and she has gone on to work in that field. So I wish I had known. And that's why I feel like there's some information that I think if it was shared more readily, it might make things work a little better. I don't have any great ideas about how we can grow. Obviously, if that was something easy, everyone would do it. Everyone has very different types of lives than when I was growing up in the church. Everybody is working. I'm always, we're struggling to find times when people can have choir practice, when people can have committee meetings, because everybody has so many conflicting priorities in their lives. There's some realities that we have to face and incorporate and still find some way to involve more people, get more energy and ideas

The children's program is extremely important. I have been very impressed with this church and just how much it gets out of its volunteer staff and how little permanent staff it actually has. I mean, I think we have three permanent staff, if I'm remembering, maybe four. And, you know, it could behoove us to maybe have an additional staff member, maybe an activities director or a mission director or something like that. But I have noticed over the last two years, or maybe it's about a year and a half, and maybe it's just because I was looking for it, that we've seemed to have had more congregational meetings. maybe one a quarter. And it seems to me like there's been an effort at transparency or sort of at least teaching the congregation the inner workings of the church, you know, what goes into the finances, what goes into running a church. I think that should continue. I mean, I think some of the impromptu stuff that's been handed around at those meetings come up with three ideas and jot them down on this piece of paper and drop them in this basket. You know, I feel like this church is making an effort to sort of be a democratic institution. And it's easier when you don't have a big bureaucracy. And I don't think we have a big bureaucracy, at least in the leadership of the church. I think it would be nice for us in those congregational meetings to maybe learn a little bit about what happens outside of the bureaucracy. So what are the things that our pastors are being asked to do from the mother church? Not critical because I think this church is on a good path and has a good mission and has a good congregation of people that really want to do good things The other thing I would say, maybe like two or three years into our time in the church, I seem to remember just a time of like some unprecedented enthusiasm and engagement of our community around the capital campaign. And I mean, some of you will remember, I mean, there were events, we went to people's houses, we talked, we came up with ideas. And I wonder if we could do something like that again, maybe around mission or around growth, how to

grow the youth community, something like that, so that we engage everybody again in something of joint importance to the church. So anyway, that would be some of my thoughts for to move forward without breaking the things that we really do well

I think growth has been a bit of a common theme, you know, this evening, not crazy sort of unintentional growth, but I do, sounds like there's good appetite for that. But I think that needs, it typically tends to need resources, right? And I'm thinking about this in two ways. I think from the existing congregation, if you can find something that doesn't feel like work to someone, then, that's kind of a sort of a little piece of magic that can benefit, both the congregation, the church, and the individual themselves, right? I'm not saying that's easy to do, but there are definitely little pockets, I think of housing advocacy. And maybe we could do a slightly better job of sort of unlocking some of that kind of hidden value, maybe, for people who might suddenly have a little more time on their hands than they used to. Maybe someone's coming up on retiring, right? Or maybe someone's kids are off to college or, being sort of intentional about who are the congregants who might maybe might not be quite as busy in the future as they've been in the past, right? So I think there's I think there's possibly some good thought thinking to do there, possibly, you know, and thinking and matching, maybe. on the resource side, it I don't know the church's finances very well, but it's amazing to me how many people who maybe don't have, you know, don't have like have sort of built up some resources and don't actually have anyone to pass it on to. I don't know if it's a full-on capital campaign so much as making sure people know, you know, if you've got any spare cash, we could use it, right? Maybe it's a little bit of a different message to the annual, sort of like the annual thing, you know, that I think we're familiar with, but like, you know, If the church is meaningful to you, like here's where you, here's where we could use a gift of X. Here's what Y would enable us to do. Here's what Z would enable us to do. Thoughtful, targeted, intentional, maybe individual, right? And I'm probably showing my finance world bias here, but you know, this is how, this is how universities do it. This is, you know, they, bond themselves quite well by being really targeted and intentional about, trying to have something to offer in return for a potential donation. It's sort of like the annual campaign and then once every whatever years capital campaign and they seem to be the two buttons you hit. And I think there's, you know, I think there's probably some other paths there, potentially. Sorry, that's a sort of weird answer to land on, but they were my two ideas.

Two things that kind of ties into each other is that Amy was really inclusive with every other person who has a disability. So we need a pastor that's inclusive. Youth pastor, yeah.

Figuring out our hiring is the first step. You know, we were lucky to be able to bring in Katie this year to address the children's program, but that's a short term thing just for this year. And so where are we going to be going forward? Are we going to be hiring another associate pastor? Are we not gonna be looking for another associate pastor? But you know, I think the church needs to figure the hiring out before we can really move forward in my mind. I think I feel like we're sort of in a place where we're treading water, but hopefully once we have that set, then people feel like we can really launch from that stable base and and try and grow.

When I sit and I look at everybody in the congregation, I often wonder is, do they agree with everything she's saying? These people are a little different. You know, I think part of this whole thing is to get groupthink or getting everybody to say, yeah, this is what our vision is. Once we really crystallize the vision, and then we can start working towards it. And I think you're right. I think having the associate pastor is in there. And I think going through this visioning process and saying, are we really all clear? This is what we want. This is what our priorities.? It's a very logical process. You're saying is, This is our vision. What do we need to get there? And I think this is a really good process. And I'm sure by going through this process, you're getting a whole bunch of different people that's saying, this is our vision. I see some pretty clear visions here. And once that's clear, you know, get together with Megan, get together with the senior folks, and others, and saying, how do we get there? Alignment, people working together, having a similar vision, I think is the first step. And if you can get that, then you're in pretty good shape.

I hope that they would hire somebody of color on the staff and begin to make diversity more clear. I think there need to be different access points, not just the main Sunday service that we have now. I think that we need other different forms of worshipable access services, different times, different days of the week, different forms of it. The one access point draws in only a certain kind of people and we're all similar. I would like to see dissimilar people.

I think that once we are aligned in a potentially simpler vision for right now, kind of in a rebuilding mode. I really think simultaneously we need to focus on the hiring and decide, someone else said it, are we going to do a second pass or not? And outreach, I'm just a huge believer that energy begets energy. And I think it would be for all the reasons that have come up already, why outreach is important.

The way is both in-reach and outreach. It's both. And in-reach meaning continuing to develop stronger relationships within the church, and then outreach, reaching out to the community, to those populations that are in need and or of interest of what we have. It's not always needy populations that we need to go after. It's sometimes people that are just interested. And I think this, without being spoken, our church is pretty political. And I think that is attractive in this day and age. I don't know if you all heard Megan's sermon last week, but it was a knockout. I think it's important for the world to hear these messages at this time, because church is a place where we can stand against some of the forces that are happening around us. And I think the church historically has been that voice to stand against, dare I say, evil.

First of all, I think we need to deepen our stewardship each year. I think we should have a well-publicized annual pledge drive, perhaps with a social event tied to it. I think we should contact each member with a letter, you know, a personal outreach to each member, not just broadcasting things in e-mail, saying, not demanding it, but saying that pledging is a part of our culture, it's necessary, and we hope you'll consider it, and so forth and so on. And I think along with that that we should strengthen and develop membership development. I mean, we have a lot of committees, but I think we should have someone who is focused on reaching out, engaging people who come to visit, perhaps having dinners just for new members or people who are just interested in becoming a member and, you know, really market the church. And the other thing is, I think, and this is just personal, is I think we should have some what I call after hours things. I think we adult religious education or I attended years ago a wonderful one, three or four session seminar with the minister on how do you deal with grief in your faith? We could have a group that's designed to support older people in aging and have activities just for them, things like that, as well as maybe some courses or seminars on our faith and other people's faith. Maybe invite someone to come in from a mosque and talk about what does Islam mean. I think it would enrich our life, and I think it would draw in other people.

I think we need a mindset shift. A mindset shift. I think this is a church that is very scarcity-minded versus abundance-minded. And I think if we're going to get to where we want to go vision-wise, we're going to need to have an abundance mentality and be willing to invest. And I think what we need to invest in is our staff. And I think we need to very quickly recognize we have an outstanding, albeit young and inexperienced, senior pastor. And if we want her to thrive and shine, we have an opportunity now to think about what complements Megan in that and what really will encourage the development of that thriving, abundant church. And I would actually say this is an opportunity. We were gifted a very generous gift where we just reach it and invest and potentially say that, you know what, it's actually two roles. Because I think youth and family is a role. I also think there's a role to be had that is around, whether it's a, you know, you just said the relationship building among the adults that who have children gone mission, things like that. And I think if we were to invest in capacity building, that instead of relying on very, very stretched thin members with staff, we will start to have the programming and we will start to have the things that begin to get people back in. Look what happened when Amy finally got to go back full-time on youth ministry! We started to see families come, and I'm afraid my fear is that we'll get into this, we don't have any money and not replace it.

I feel like we need to be open to being church in a new way. And I really don't know what that means. I just know that I'm a very traditional person. I came out of the womb Presbyterian, and I like traditional church. I love it, but I also find it kind of frustrating and unsatisfying because I don't feel like it's meeting the moment. And that's so where I say I'm willing to think differently and outside the box, but I don't know what that is. And it's not like I want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. But I would be ready, for example, to throw away the building and go be a storefront church. Not that I'm very serious about that, but I'm willing to think outside the box. So I think that's something that we need, it's a mindset shift. But we need to think about doing church differently, whether that's being on TikTok or Instagram. I mean, no one's on Facebook anymore. We can't be the Facebook church. And I think about all these unchurched people in my life, and I'm like, you would love church. But when they just look at us from the outside, I don't think that we're very appealing.

I think there's been a lot of brainstorming about outreach, about in reach, about what if we do this? What if we try to bring in, you know, more kids who are the friends of the kids as a put, all this kind of stuff. I think experience would suggest that somehow, you know, getting the kids in the door and getting them committed is actually the way to do

it, or it was the way to do it. It's harder now with kids having more on their plate and families having more on their plate with activities on the weekends that take all their time. I do think that and what did so, I guess if you would have to generalize that about, what did that provide to you know, what? Why did the family stay? The families didn't have to stay. The kids liked it, but the families didn't have to stay. And I think so maybe we can expand beyond, like, what did the kids get out of that? What did the adults get out of it? And I think because they stayed too

Relationships become so strong here, and you know, somebody comes in, you don't know why they ended up here and then, and then they're here forever. You know, I think I feel as though we have a strong minister. I feel we have a strong pastor. I don't feel that there's weakness there. I do think that having a good, you know, children's minister is important, but we had a very strong one. It still was hard so that, you know, that's not enough. It's not and so, you know, there was something she could have been more organized about some things, some things, I feel that sometimes there wasn't 100% follow through. There were great ideas that, but she was strong so that that wasn't the problem. I guess we have to figure out, what are people looking for? What does this church give that they're not getting elsewhere? I do think a peaceful place, you know, where there's some awareness of politics without it taking over is important. So there's sort of awareness, and that is motivating a lot of what people's actions and behaviors and values are. But that's not all that we are. I don't know. How you know? How do we find those people who are looking or don't know that they're looking, but that I don't know, how do we get people to know that the value of being with people who you would never have known otherwise? How do you find those people? I don't know. I don't know. A great place to end with a question.

I think one of the reasons that we are excited to be here is because it does feel like there are exciting things in the future of the church. And it seems to me coming in relatively fresh, that this is maybe a point where we're thinking really intentionally about what might be next, which gives me hope that there can be lots of exciting things ahead. One thing that's specifically important to me and to us is the fact that this church, I think, is so welcoming to queer and trans folks. And I think that's something that we would love to see even more of and for there to be even more queer and trans folks in the congregation feeling comfortable here, having people feeling really comfortable and excited to bring their kids here who may identify somewhere in the LGBTQ spectrum as like a place where we can really sort of like celebrate that. I think even just like having the pronouns on the new name tags, like that feels like a great sort of step in that

direction. And it seems like that's something that we can continue to sort of grow and commit to. In terms of all of the great mission work that the church does, it feels to me like We want to continue that. And also we want to be cognizant of like how much sort of like bandwidth and people power we have. And so it seems like there is this question of like not necessarily doing more, but just like sort of thinking about like clarifying what our priorities are and having a really clear sense of like what we can consistently show up for. I know that's already been part of like the conversation that we've had about supporting family aid. I would love to see like more, you know, younger folks entering the community, as I'm sure many people would. And I think it feels to me too, like, you know, this is true of all communities and all church communities, I'm sure, like this idea of like, we've got to, you know, continue to sort of like pass the baton to the next generation. And, I'm hoping that, we can be part of that, but that there are other people too who are going to be excited to be part of that too. So I think those are all things that I think about when I think about the future.

I would certainly like to see more growth in the church and more younger families. I think it's going to be, it's necessary for our church. In the early 90s, we actually considered merging with another church because our membership and our finances were in such terrible condition. And I think we're not particularly healthy right now in terms of our finances or membership. And I think we really need to work on that. I think that COVID dealt a blow in terms of church attendance to all churches. And I think a lot of the churches are recovering from that. And we're one of them. People, a lot of people just don't come anymore. They got used to not coming during COVID. And I would also like to see us have a really good conversation about where we want to put our church money and our church energies, because I think that's important. And I think there are a lot of very good competing thoughts about what should be done with the money that we have and the money that comes in. And I think an honest and respectful conversation around that would be very helpful in terms of growing where we want to grow in the next three to five years. I'd also love to see the music program a little stronger. It's an important part of worship to me. I would like to see more worship and less conversation, I guess, in church services. But I am very much a traditionalist.

In three to five years, I think it's essential that we have a growing Sunday school program, because if we don't pass on our faith to the next generation, then kind of what is the point of our existence as a church? I think that comes with strong community connections. Churches grow locally. So being involved in local communities, whether that is in schools or local missions, I think would play a key role in that. Having a

continue to have a vibrant worship service with great preaching is critical. And once the church grows, indeed, stable financial footing would also be essential in three to five years.

I would like to see growth in the church, more people in the pews. Back in the day, you used to ask your children when they were dating, is he Protestant? Is he Catholic? Is he Jewish? And he said, and you don't ask that anymore. You just ask, are they a good person? And I love that we are so open and welcoming and so diverse. I just want to have an experience for families and their kids where you do feel that there's a spiritual core to you, however it's nurtured. I just want that. I think it's so important as you go through life to have that spiritual core to rely upon, by whatever name you call it. I love the mission work here. In terms of growth, I know this sounds like pie-in-the-sky hope, but I really wish we could have our own space and not have to rent out our best spaces so that we could get through the day. I loved Fellowship and Fellowship Hall, or in the little fancier chance. I don't know the right name for the room, but what is it? Reception. Reception room, yeah. So yeah, I just wish we could keep strong and keep together. do feel like we're living in challenging times outside, and I just feel like we need to nurture. We need the nurturing that's available in a strong church to face the outside.

When I think about where I'd like to see the church and its ministries in three to five years, the first the two words that come to my mind are when you walk in, I'd love to see vibrancy and a more robust congregation and a robust feeling of, uh, everybody kind of having a can-do attitude at times right now. I'd like to think that in three to five years that we would figure out how to kind of regain our steam post COVID. Where I'd like to see the church in three to five years is that missions still be a really strong priority and maybe even a greater emphasis. I feel like there's a lot of secular organizations in the community where you can get involved in outreach work, but the church has unique opportunities of putting our faith into action. I love to see more young families, young people, and also build upon our church being open to all and being very inclusive.

I guess we're all exploring in our lives at this point, as far as our faith. I grew up here with my brother, and my husband's been here and put people want to come back to church? I don't know. They've had bad experiences.

What will it take to get advertising but you see, I think from where we are today as a group, and not focus on I am this, and I am that, and I am this, and I am that, it's just who you are. I know we're all welcoming, but sometimes there's a little bit too much emphasis on certain things, you know, certain people's backgrounds and this and that and the other thing. And I don't I think it should be individualized, or everybody is a person, regardless of where you're from. And I think there's too much.

I think we should take some of the money that we have that's kind of set a lot, set aside, like in the Hollywood quest, and and invest in growth. I don't think we are going to be able to grow with very tight accounting where we only invest in growth to the extent we can, based on the current income of the Riverside lease share and the small memberships set of contributions. I think we should decide strategically to take, to take money to invest in growth, and that that growth will then bring us a large enough community that we then increase the contributions. And I think the investment specifically should be in leadership. I think we should think about Amy's position. And rather than following up with that, Amy's position with a narrowly defined children, only part time or less, young, inexperienced, I think we should go for the best we can possibly find that can help co lead. We have a senior pastor, but play a major leadership role for the whole for the whole church community, and also for the outgrowth, lead individual. It's the people who lead churches that draw new members some well, it can be the members who do outreach or whatever, but what gets people coming back is really being hooked by the leadership qualities of the people at the front. And that's what we need to invest in, it seems to me.

I think acceptance of people as they are, and a lack of judgment or criticism is good, and I think this fits in very nicely with our welcoming idea, and people do feel welcome. And I think just accepting the special things that the church has to offer, like, you know, help I some kind of just, I think that's about it.

I think it will take a lot of outreach to the broader community. And reason I say that is we have a lot of existing relationships, such as the Riverside School, the Taiwanese church, etc. In our community, the Riverside School has a lot of kids. We have few, if any, of those who come to church, although some have over time. But that relationship is a very transactional relationship, and not, you know, a localized faith based really, like we do not see those kids on and maybe it's because they're there all week, they don't want to come back, I don't know. So I think, I think that that kind of outreach, and then, you

know, expanding and broadening the things we're doing with organizations like family aid, GBIO and all the others like, I think we're doing a lot of things that would help us. And in some ways, I'm not even sure it's a resource issue any longer. I think, I think for a long time, we thought there had to be a sort of tactical way of solving the problem. And, you know, maybe it's a capital campaign, or maybe it's but I think we have to sort of agree, as a church, what that arc looks like to get there. And if it's if it's deepening and broadening the base, then I think we need to figure out ways to make this, what has historically been a church building, you know, open up into the community and draw people in, in a way that people want to be there, right as a community.

I think that mandatory in person attendance, I think that, again, a focus on. On what we already have and what we've built, but I do sometimes worry that we have so much going on that I know at times I've been burnt out. I love everything that's going on with mission, for example, but there's so much going on. I almost would like to see us focus more on a few small things that everybody's really passionate, not everybody, everybody's not going to be passionate about the same thing. But you know, personally, some of the activities that I really enjoyed were, you know that the Nicaragua trip with the youth, we did the Rauschenbusch Metro ministries, we did a field trip there and it was just a weekend. The cost was very low. It was highly educational. It was spiritual. And we were giving back to the community. We addressed, you know, did helped hand out food and whatnot. So it kind of combined three things that I think are important generally to the members of this church, and the Appalachia trip that the children did the Montgomery trip. These I think can focus a lot of people at one time and and build community, even our our retreats, our church retreats, have been excellent, but I think it's really hard to get people to commit to even an afternoon or weekend. So, a fewer number of activities where we're pulling the existing members together and then, yeah, outreach to the community. I think it's would be wonderful if we could use the church as a base like the candlelight vigil, and this was a community event, but it, as you describe, it, drew people to the church. And so those sorts of events would be, I think, quite meaningful and useful to members outside of the immediate church family.

I want strong worship. It is grounding. I want that. If I don't have that, I can get community, other, other places, not the same. It's not the same. I want my I want a faith community, and so being grounded in worship and not just grounded loving being there on Sunday morning really matters to me, and I feel so blessed to have the ministers that we've had and the quality of worship that we've had, I think has been exceptionally good. I am content, but I don't think we should continue exactly as we are. I think we

have to be more experimental with different forms of worship, certainly with music, certainly with different ways of worshipping together, because I don't think this is the mold that'll hold the future, and so we've got to just break out of the mold. And I know some people won't like that. So I think maybe, you know, one Sunday a month we start and maybe we have breakfast together over like we did that for Amy, but it was really wonderful. Or just different something besides a sermon, different kind of music. Uh, we got to push some edges. Really got to push some edges. I really agree strongly about building on what we have, and I think we need more opportunities to deepen the relationships we have in small groups that allow people to commit for a short period of time and then recommit if they want, because it's a very committed church. So maybe we have to take it in small segments, a month, six weeks at a time, and then you can continue and that they are a little more focused on interest or parts of our faith or spiritual journey, or global warming and climate and but I would like more depth of relationship around things that we commonly care about that are learning about each other as well as what we want to address. So for instance, Nicaragua, I think it's one of the best things the church has ever done, but it only recently has really even asked the question, so why are we still bringing suitcases to Nicaragua of supplies? I mean, it's it everything we do can have deeper intentionality and connection with our faith and the why and and how we do it. So small groups is really critical to me. More public forums that draw from the outside around critical issues that matter now. Conversation series I wanted to have is conversations that matter to just engage with our neighbors and to bring other people into the church, not just through Sunday mornings that they get connected.

I think if we're going to draw the diversity that we like to think of ourselves as being a diverse congregation, we've got to do a better job of representing what those different communities have some attraction or need to and I think of specifically in our own community. We have some trans young adults, and I think they though we're embraced. We we don't meet them really where they are, and we don't have we don't help people get along for get further along in their understanding. Why is this so hard for people? Just, I mean, if we speak the words, then what are we doing? What are we doing to really make those people feel welcome in us as wanting to be a part, not to segment, but just that, if we're that kind of community, and we just have to open in more ways. And I think that's scary for our church. I think there's a lot of wanting to hold on to what is, even though there's other talk that there's, it's pretty traditional, and at some of its roots. And I like traditional stuff. I just don't think it's enough to take us to the future. In terms of the outreach, and it works both ways, I think it's really important to make the point that social justice work is the work and walking in the way of Jesus. And I think

that, again, I need to keep bringing it back to like politics and the divide. But I think we're all at our core, very similar and we want, we all want a safe place for our kids. We want our kids to be fed. We want our kids to be housed. We don't want a lot of conflict. Going back to first principles could be a very good thing, and I mean that from internally, somebody who might be more conservative, to externally, meeting people where they are. I wonder. I'm not sure about this, if specific kinds of commitment, even for short periods of asking, people would help. I think if there were more less focus on dogma in the church at large, and just something that very personal about the embodiment of what kind of human being are we really talking about? Who do we want to become like more focus there that we're not embarrassed or shy to talk about Jesus, but it doesn't mean you only get saved by believing in Jesus. But we keep making that reference, and people begin to feel it a different kind of welcome in that that feels important to me.