

## LOVE TOGETHER

*To love and accept others unconditionally as God loves and accepts us, and by example, to encourage others to do the same. (From our congregation's Mission Statement)*

The First Congregational United Church of Christ is unlike any church my husband and I have ever attended because it offers everyone unconditional love. The word “love” is overused in our popular culture; we love our cars, kitchen cabinets, even our toilet paper! Some of the other churches we have attended have spoken of love in conditional terms: love Jesus or suffer, love the teachings and the creeds of the church or there will be consequences. This church openly embraces all people, regardless of race, sexual orientation, economic status, or social class. How do we see this happening? We see it in the sharing of the peace when each Sunday every member gets up and sincerely embraces all those around her or him. We see it in the pews, where a heterosexual couple celebrating their fiftieth anniversary hold hands sitting next to a gay couple embracing each other on the eve of their wedding. We see it during Second Helping when those same diverse people serve a meal to the poorest in our community. We see it when members of this congregation reach out to the members of Bethel AME Church and the Muslim congregation. We also see it in the beauty of the service: our organists, Bob and Mary Ellen, make singing hymns thrilling; our wonderful choir, led by Gretchen Lewis, inspires us; Pastor Caela delivers beautiful, challenging, carefully crafted sermons. Church here is never boring. Instead, the service often brings Dave and me to tears. We are loved here for who we are regardless of what we might believe or how often we fail to live up to the high standards set by the life of Jesus. Only love is real, and this church truly reflects the reality of love.

Charlotte MacFarland

