

## **WHAT CONGREGATIONALISM MEANS TO ME**

Belonging to a Congregational Church not only grants me a place to nourish my faith, but it also wonderfully gives me a sense of belonging and community. Plymouth is a place where I can go to worship and feel welcomed.

As far back as I can remember, Plymouth Church has always helped shape parts of my life. I grew up at Plymouth quite literally. My mother was a soprano section leader in the choir when she was pregnant with me. She sang right up until my due date. She sang on a cold December Sunday morning and the very next day went to the hospital to have a scheduled C-section. When I became old enough to go to Sunday school, I would attend church with my older sister almost every Sunday. As a child, I remember collecting money in paper coin boxes for UNICEF. I loved that Plymouth made individual bouquets of flowers from the floral arrangements that were on the altar. Each arrangement was hand delivered to elderly members who could not physically attend Sunday service. I fondly remember a special minister during my childhood years who during the Children's sermon, would warmly invite us to listen to him while enthusiastically encouraging us to learn about the Bible by asking us thought provoking questions. We had Sunday afternoon Youth Group get togethers and Confirmation classes. I was confirmed and baptized here as a teenager. Through all of this, Plymouth taught me to strive to become a better person and to go beyond one's self to help others.

The Plymouth community made me feel welcome, safe and encouraged. A couple of years before I moved to Pennsylvania for college, I joined my Mom in the loft and volunteered to sing in the choir. It was there that I was inspired by one of the choir directors to pursue singing while at college. I did just that and had an exciting college career. However, after graduating, I began to feel a bit lost. I knew I needed to find some faith and guidance. The Congregational community at Plymouth was there for me spiritually and practically. Spiritually, I was able to return with a more mature mind to form a deeper faith and receive guidance in a place where I felt that Love and inclusiveness guided people. Practically, I had auditioned for the opportunity to be a section leader in the Plymouth Choir and was given the position (roughly 16 years ago!). To this day, I am so thankful that I get to sing beautiful music with wonderful people. Participating in this role has

given me the opportunity to do something that I love for a community that has consistently been there for me. Attending Sunday worship regularly has also allowed me to continue to feed my faith and feel a sense of belonging and community.

Plymouth Church strives to lead with love and openness. This is exemplified in the outreach efforts of the Plymouth community. During the height of Covid in NYC, a group of Plymouth members called congregants to check up on them and ask if anyone needed help. I received one of those calls. Plymouth gives back to the community - providing warmth, shelter and home cooked meals to homeless men, collecting food to give to local food pantries and running a thrift shop where proceeds go towards organizations that fight human-trafficking, just to name a few. These actions are a direct result of the amount of Love felt by the presence of faith which I am reminded of time and time again. This is what being a Congregationalist means to me.

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