

*In a world that often feels fast paced and disconnected, finding a sense of belonging and a community that supports your values and beliefs can be a challenging endeavor. For many, the search for a like-minded group of individuals leads them to their local church. I originally come from a small town where, once you come out of the closet, church is no longer an option for you. That was one of the main things I was looking forward to when moving to Boise. When I first moved, I looked on the Community Center website for open and affirming churches. Wright Congregational United Church of Christ was one of the churches listed on the website. I had gone through the listed churches' statements of faith and found that I liked the sound of the UCC. I attended Wright Church first and have never gone anywhere else.*

*The congregation at Wright is brimming with smiling, friendly faces. You are greeted by several people and made to feel so welcome. It took me a few months to actually admit to anyone there that I was a lesbian, and it made no difference. I am generally a reserved person and don't really have friends, but I have grown so much from my attendance there. I have helped organize a Trunk-Or-Treat, spoken in front of the congregation, run social hour after church several times, and attended a couple of bible study groups. It is in one such study group that I found my tribe. Being authentic allows you to connect with people who appreciate your sincerity and share common experiences. Vulnerability can lead to profound connections and personal growth. It wasn't until the study group was over that I realized how much I missed my meetings with these two lovely ladies. We knew deep things about each other from attending the classes and we built a bond from that. Now we try to do something with each other every week. We even got baptized together. I have not laughed as much in years as I have these last few months. I am not currently in a romantic relationship, yet I feel less lonely than I felt when I was in a relationship. They have become my tribe. This is how we became the church chicks.*

*They are a safe haven where I can be myself without judgment. In this tribe and church community, I find understanding and support in good times (when my oldest daughter got married) and bad (when my 7-week-old grandbaby passed away). This has created a vital safety net for my emotional and mental well-being. I do not know where I would be without them.*

*I have discovered a couple of amazing women who resonate with my soul and uplift my life. In a world that can sometimes feel isolating, my tribe has become my refuge, my sounding board, and my source of joy and inspiration.*

*- April Alves*