

# Get to Know MSMC Leadership Board

## Meet Pam Duncan: “Turns out my passion is community”

By Rev. Amy S. Zimbelman



“My father knew he was going to die young,” Pam told me. “And so, before he died, he drilled into my head this question: ‘How are you going to make the world a better place than the way you found it?’”

This question has stuck with Pam through the years. Pam’s dad, a middle school math teacher, did die young of kidney disease, leaving her mother to raise 4 kids while working as an elementary school teacher in Riverside, California. Pam followed in her parents’ footsteps by getting her PhD in Political Science and becoming an educator herself. She now works as a senior instructor at Colorado State.

While Pam has helped thousands of students think critically about government systems and power and their rights over the years, it’s not her passion.

“It’s a way to make a living,” she says.

So what *is* her passion? “Turns out my passion is community. The United States has a serious pathology with this radical individualism. We’re too isolated in this country. There’s so much loneliness, and human beings are herd animals—we’re not meant to live like this. This is what literally keeps me up at night: how to build community?”

Pam felt this desire for community acutely when she was getting her PhD and raising her daughter alone. “I went church shopping after my divorce and one of my activist friends invited me to the Mennonite Church in Fort Collins. My first thought was: *These people are too intense for me*. But by the end of the service, I was a Mennonite. I had no idea that there was a whole denomination out there that shared my particular questions about Christianity. In other words, I discovered the Mennonites and realized I had actually always been one.”

Pam has jumped into building community with Mennonites over the years. Pam was one of the founding members of Sojourn Mennonite in 2012, and she served as the chair of the congregation for its first five years. She currently serves on the Mountain States Mennonite Conference Leadership Board as well as the SEED committee and is a liaison to the RACE task force.

Her home community grew as well. Pam married Steve Mumme in 2010 and became a stepmother to his daughter.

When I asked her what she hopes for the future, Pam also talked about building community, both in Mennonite circles and beyond.

She has some experience in the nonprofit world and plans to start a nonprofit in the near future that would focus on community. The organization will facilitate spaces and events where folks from different backgrounds can come together to socialize, garden, experience rites of passage, etc. across lines of difference.

And what does she hope for Mennonite circles, where she is consistently working to make the world a better place than the way she found it?

“I hope that Mennonites can share our message more widely. Finding Mennonites made me realize that community is possible. We can do community together and we can benefit from it and everyone needs to benefit from it. It would be such a healing thing for our society.”

“Being part of the Mennonite community has been such a blessing. It has completely changed my life.”