

# Get to Know MSMC Leadership

## Jen Dudenhefer: Open, kind, and friendly (and not one to sit still)

By Rev. Amy S. Zimbelman



When I ask Jen Dudenhefer what she wants to teach her three kids, what sort of legacy she'd like to leave them, she answers that she hopes they become compassionate people who are "open, kind, and friendly."

"My girls can trip and fall while figuring out what kind of career paths they want—but if we can raise good humans in the midst of so many screens and so much privilege, then we've succeeded," she says.

The likelihood of Jen succeeding in that venture is quite high, considering she is practicing what she preaches. Not only is Jen herself open, kind, and friendly, but she also tirelessly and humbly serves others. As Mountain States Mennonite Conference's Administrator, Jen is the person behind the scenes setting up registration for events, sending out emails to churches, compiling articles for this newsletter, scheduling Zoom meetings, etc.—and doing all this with a smile.

Jen first found her way to the area in 1993. She grew up in Ohio but after graduating from Muskingum College, a Presbyterian school, she moved west to work at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp. From there, she served in Mennonite Voluntary Service at Boulder Mennonite Church (BMC), and was part of the church's founding VS unit.

Being part of BMC through the years has been a mainstay in her life, forming her and challenging her to be the person she is today.

"There have been so many things that make me proud to be a part of Boulder Mennonite Church," she says. "We put our faith in practice and walk the talk. We pay attention to big, important, current issues. Every pastor we've had there has been amazing. The church is on the cutting edge of things I need to challenge myself on—we're troublemakers."

While BMC has been a constant in her life (at one point she also served as their church administrative assistant), Jen is not one to sit still. She could be called a Jen-of-All-Trades who has had many different interests and jobs through the years.

Jen has served the next generation through various jobs, paid and unpaid. After VS, she nannied for a couple years. In 2002, she met and married her husband David, a software developer, and then took some time off from outside employment to do the important work of raising their three children. Jen eventually became the treasurer for her kids' elementary school's Parent Teacher Organization, and worked for their after-school care program.

But while she has a heart ready to serve adults and kids alike, she's also got a competitive edge to her. Jen spent much of her 20's competing in a women's ultimate frisbee team that traveled to various states including California, Arizona, and Texas. (When asked if she was any good, she laughed and said, "I was on a good team and a not-so-good team. The good team did win some games. The not-so-good team always lost but we had fun.") As a natural athlete, she's participated in many snowshoe races, triathlons, running and biking events. Her current challenge is yoga.

Jen has not only exercised her body but has also exercised her business savvy over the years, including by working at an insurance company and as a technical recruiter for software engineers.

And most recently, she's coupled business savvy with an entrepreneurial spirit. Jen has been running her own dog walking business, Happy Hearts Dog Walking, for the last three years. In March 2021, she did the legal work necessary to make it an official LLC.

"I was pulling away from working in places where I had to clock in and clock out—I didn't want all of this oversight and supervision. Taking on my own business has felt very freeing, and I really like the independence. It's satisfying to be accountable only to myself and my clients."

But in different seasons of life and while working at various places, Jen's commitment to the church continues to remain constant. Since she started as the conference's administrator, she's become more passionate about helping others realize the great things that churches in our conference are up to:

"I never really connected to the conference before working for the conference," she says. "I wish more people understood what a good connection and resource the conference can be. But I'll keep putting the invite out there, saying, 'This is what the Hmong church is doing.' 'This is what Emmanuel is doing.' Covid has made it more possible for people to visit other churches and connect more, so it would be great if that continues. My hope is that people in our conference will know that they're not alone."

And as time goes on, with Jen's open, kind, and friendly attitude at the administrative helm, there's a good chance that she'll meet her goal: that more folks around the conference will, in fact, feel less alone.