

PHOTO CREDIT: (left) Jen Clements; (right) Mike Mason



Getting to know ... **SUNDAY MORNING'S** **“JEN TECH”**

by Karen Hendricks

If you've been attending St. Stephen's virtual church services on Zoom, chances are you know who "Jen Tech" is. Pastor Matthew's tech-savvy neighbor has helped services run smoothly since the pandemic hit. But many of you don't know her real name, beyond "Jen," or other details—until now.

Her actual name is Jen Clements, and she's lived in Carlisle with her husband Paul for 15 years—next-door to the Best family.

"We loved the idea of having neighbors for our kids to grow up with, and having that vision happen, is pretty special," Jen says. "They are like family—our family memories are wrapped up together."

The two families—with seven children between them—have carpooled and relied on each other for all types of support through the years, so when the pandemic hit and Pastor Matthew mentioned that he was trying to find a solution for online worship, Jen didn't hesitate. She offered her assistance with Zoom, since she'd been teaching via the platform for several years.

Jen, a social work professor at Shippensburg University, teaches masters-level classes through Ship's partnership with Millersville University. While she's a teacher during her professional time online, she found herself in a new position during her Sunday mornings spent online with St. Stephen.

"It's allowed me the opportunity to hold a space to learn and listen, and I don't know that I typically would [attend

church]; normally I'm too busy—life is filled with busyness and there isn't the space to have the quiet," Jen says. "Running the technology is not super labor intensive, so I get to participate and that's been meaningful. The words [Pastor] Matt shares have had a huge impact on me—he challenges folks to think and react, and that's inspiring and encouraging. And the traditional parts of worship are comforting because they remind me of childhood."

Jen grew up attending an Episcopalian church with her mother, and she's always identified herself as a Christian. She and Paul, both from Maryland, moved numerous times before settling down in Carlisle, and as a result, "got away from the faith community," Jen explains.

There was one particular Sunday when St. Stephen's worship service especially resonated for Jen.

"The game changer for me was the service done by women [on Mother's Day]. Stacy [Schroeder's] sermon moved me to tears—it was the most validating thing I'd ever heard in the church. After years of [the church] not validating women or people of color, I felt like she was speaking from inside my soul. It followed with [Pastor] Matt's service about Amaud Arbury, then George Floyd, and because it's so important to tackle these things that are happening, that is exciting to me—that was the piece that was always lacking for me [in church]," Jen says.

Attending St. Stephen's online services is also a bonding time for Jen and her oldest daughter, Maya, 16.



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ST STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Upcoming dates: TBD

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“She’s here with me every Sunday, praying and singing along,” Jen says. And the church services are a launching point for some “good conversations” between mother and daughter.

Jen says she’s thought about attending various area churches through the years, but “the barrier for me was walking through the door into a group of strangers,” she explains. “It was actually easier for me to join this way, [online]. And I appreciate the opportunity to have been welcomed so openly.”

One of Jen’s favorite aspects of online worship actually occurs before worship begins—that’s why she makes sure to log into Zoom well before 8:30 a.m.

“My favorite part is before services, when people are chatting, asking, ‘How is this person?’ and giving updates on that person,” Jen says. “I’m always the first one there—initially, it was because of anxiety and making sure everything went fine. But now it’s because I enjoy hearing folks checking in and talking...the real shift for me is the sense of community I hear.” †