



Our Pilgrim Stories

Belonging

Joe Kaminer, a big muscular bear of a guy, could be imposing, that is, until he shoots you one of his huge entire face grins. Those grins can turn your entire day around in an instant.

He cherishes his family, sings to everything and anything musical, loves theater and movies, and is as much a Trekkie as he is a Star Wars fan. That's right, he doesn't have favorites of any kind. And the music? He does karaoke and DJs on the side as "DJ Joe Joe."

Although Joe doesn't talk about the years before he and his sister were adopted, he was, as he puts it, "in the foster child system" and 11 years old when they came to live with their new mom in Batesburg-Leesville.

"As a foster child, I am very blessed and fortunate to come out the way I did. I don't want anybody to go through those things. At the same time, those experiences shaped who I am. I missed out on being a kid and had to grow up fast. And I am so thankful my mom didn't give up on me."

Joe's experiences make him really care about things like acceptance, belonging, and family — things he's found with the people of Pilgrim. Joe sings in the choir and serves on church council and in Pilgrim's Lutheran Men in Mission. His wife, Jackie, is also very active at Pilgrim.

"We're like a close-knit growing family here at Pilgrim," Joe says. "As part of council, I get to see the changes happening, the direction we're taking, and the progress we're making. We have a sense of purpose. We are changing our culture for the better, becoming more welcoming, and looking for more opportunities to do outreach. It's a good church home."