

Hinton Rural Life Center
Celebrating 60: Embracing Our Roots & Sharing the Fruits

Reflections . . .

January 16, 2021



Rev. Kathleen Kilbourne

Retired United Methodist Deacon, Western NC Conference
Former Director, MAPT Program, Pfeiffer University
Hinton Rural Life Center Board of Directors

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. — 1 John 3:16-18, NRSV

Hi, I’m Kathleen Kilbourne, one of the newest members of Hinton Rural Life Center’s Board of Directors. After serving Western North Carolina for 39 years, I retired as a United Methodist deacon in full connection in 2018. Now, I look forward to supporting and engaging in the ministries of Hinton, especially during this special 60th Anniversary year, as we have opportunities to embrace our roots and share the fruits.

As I reflect on the impact Hinton has had on my life and ministry, I’d like to share a Scripture that became a mantra for me in ministry many years ago. 1 John 3:16-18 says, “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

This Scripture inspired the theme of a youth event I attended many years ago as a youth minister. The theme was “More than Words.” For me, this simple, yet powerful theme, articulates the mission and ministry of Hinton Rural Life Center and the impact Hinton has had on so many people and communities for the past 60 years and will continue to have in the future.

From early in my life, mission was a focal point of my faith tradition, and giving to others was modeled for me by my parents in many ways. We had a missions organization in our church that met every Wednesday evening to learn about and how to support missions within the community and around the world. We even had “real live missionaries” come and share about their experiences several times throughout each year. Even though I knew a lot about missions, I didn’t really have the “hands on” opportunities that would enable me to move beyond merely talking about mission to actually serving others.

That changed in the summer of 1982, when I was serving as director of youth and young adult ministries at First United Methodist Church in Morganton, North Carolina. Having never led a mission team, I was intrigued by the program offered by Hinton for two main reasons: I wanted a place that allowed junior high youth the opportunity to serve, as our youth group was small and I was determined to offer this experience to our entire group. I also wanted our group to be able to serve with youth from other churches. While those were the “seeds” that attracted me to Hinton, I want to share with you how these seeds were nurtured, scattered, and connected throughout the next 38 years.

That one week not only met these two expectations, but challenged me to embrace how mission impacted and shaped everything I was and wanted to be. I was challenged by the staff of Hinton through the garden ministry to be a steward of healthy food and of the ground necessary to provide this food. I witnessed the pride of young people who literally toiled in the garden and provided food for our meals, and I gained a better understanding, as well, of what it takes to feed others each and every day. We built lasting friendships with those from a church in Kentucky that continued throughout the years. For the first time, I was engaged in “hands-on” ministry with the families we served and built relationships with them. I watched them regain hope and pride in their homes and the ability to provide for their families. Above all, it was the impact of developing relationships with those we were helping, as well as others on the mission team, that sowed the seeds of serving others and transformed my ministry.

From that one week at Hinton in 1982, I offered mission opportunities for youth and adults throughout the years, offering them the opportunity to serve, as well as begin to integrate their mission experiences into their everyday lives, making a difference in countless ways.

Many years later, one of the youth who attended the 1982 Hinton mission week, and several mission opportunities that followed, came to my home to share what a profound impact those experiences had been, as well as how it shaped her vocational path. After graduating from Duke University and Vanderbilt Law School, Heather Manry Ziemba was on her way to Guatemala for language immersion school, so she could return to Charlotte and become an Immigration lawyer for the Latino community. She wanted me to know that the seeds sown in her life through youth mission opportunities, beginning with Hinton, filled her with the passion and desire to focus her gifts in the practice of law to this underserved community. Upon her return from Guatemala, Heather served as the founder and program director of what is now the Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy. During her time in Charlotte, I reached out to her on several occasions to assist and advise students in the graduate programs I directed -- students who were in dire need of her unique legal counsel. Three years ago, Heather opened her own immigration firm in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she serves abused children and women, as well as victims of trafficking. Heather’s life and mission is truly “more than words” and bears fruit every day that is rooted in the call to mission she embraced at Hinton Rural Life Center.

In 2018, my retirement coincided with the opportunity to reconnect with Hinton. During that spring, my dear friend and colleague, Rev. Karen Kluever, began serving at Hinton as the minister of church relations, and I began to learn more about all the other wonderful programs Hinton offers, beyond the summer mission programs and garden ministry. Hinton’s full range of ministries, including the firewood ministry, programs addressing the challenges faced by rural communities, youth mental health first aid training, as well as clergy renewal opportunities, reflect Hinton’s foundational commitment to develop and nurture the gifts within each person and empower them to make a difference . . . to truly be more than words. I am so thankful for the missional foundation that was firmly rooted in my life and ministry that summer at Hinton and now look forward to being fully engaged in the fruit-bearing ministries Hinton offers now and in the future.



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