

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

Reflections . . .

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*. . . but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint. -- Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)*

It's 2021 and at Hinton Rural Life Center we're celebrating our 60th Anniversary, since being incorporated in 1961 as an agency of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church. Sixty years of retreat and mission outreach ministry, and equipping disciples for Jesus Christ. I'm kicking off this series of weekly reflections by clergy as a way to help us celebrate our connections with Hinton Center. So many people have been impacted by their relationship with Hinton over the years, and we want to share some of these stories and our reflections with you.

I'd like to start with a Bible verse: ". . . but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." Some people familiar with Hinton may think I chose this verse – Isaiah 40:31 -- because of the eagles we have nesting here at Hinton Center. . . . But, they would be wrong. I chose this verse because it was my grandmother's favorite Bible verse. It's on a picture I gave my grandmother and then kept after she passed away. I have it in my office now, and it reminds me of my grandmother and how important she was to my faith. She was one of my roots.

Another root was a Duke Divinity School intern named Ray Surratt, who was serving at my church – Tabernacle United Methodist in Greensboro, North Carolina – when I was 17 years old. It was from Ray that I first heard about Hinton Rural Life Center. Ray had served an internship at Hinton, and it had made a significant impact on his life, his faith, and his ministry. Who knew that, 33 years later, after he'd become an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, that he'd be attending *my* ordination at the South Carolina Annual Conference.

Roots. Other roots of my faith include my parents and the Rev. Kathleen Kilbourne and Dr. Doug Hume of Pfeiffer University, where I received my master's in Christian education, an experience that was formative in shaping my faith, theological understanding, and practice of ministry. Two other big roots are the Rev. Ron Robinson and the Rev. Joe Hamby. I consider them to be my primary mentors in youth ministry, when I served as their assistants in youth ministry at Myers Park UMC in Charlotte. That was the beginning of my 25-year career as a youth pastor, definitely one of those ministries in which you're constantly sowing seeds, but unlikely to see – for the most part – the fruit of those labors.

And now, here I am at Hinton Rural Life Center – 42 years since first hearing of Hinton from Ray Surratt. And I can see this beautiful plan of God playing out, as I am now planted in a place where there is such rich soil of possibility and inspiration for retreat and mission outreach ministries, equipping of clergy and congregations, and really making a difference in the quality of life of Hinton's local community in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

I look back and see all of the experiences and training and influential people in my life -- the roots of my faith and ministry. They continued to prepare me to bear fruit, as I use my gifts and graces in reaching out to let others know how beloved they are by our Creator God and our Savior Jesus Christ and equipping THEM to bear fruit, as well.

I'm so blessed to be here at Hinton Rural Life Center at this time and to have this 60th Anniversary for sharing just a fraction of the multitude of stories of roots and fruits that have been, and continue to be, experienced and shared now and in the coming years.

And we need these stories . . . We need them now. Last year, 2020, was a tough one, but my prayer for Hinton and for all of us is that these stories of God's faithfulness and blessing will "lift us up on eagles' wings" this year and in the future.

I invite you to enjoy – as part of our 60th Anniversary Celebration – this series of weekly reflections offered by clergy who've been blessed by their connection with Hinton. We'll be posting the written versions on Hinton's web site and video versions on Hinton's Youtube channel every Saturday through September 18. Then, on Saturday, Sept 25, we will live stream a Service of Celebration from First UMC Hayesville, with guest preacher Bishop Ken Carter. I hope you'll follow Hinton Rural Life Center on Facebook and Instagram, where we'll link the video reflections, as well as post special events and offerings as we celebrate 60 years of ministry, Embracing Our Roots & Sharing Our Fruits.

