

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

Reflections . . .

January 9, 2021



Rev. Dr. Claude Kayler

Claude Kayler Coaching & Consulting
Hinton Rural Life Center Board of Directors
United Methodist Elder, Western NC Conference

Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!

-- Matthew 13:8, New Living Translation

Is there anybody in your life who you knew before they were famous? Anybody about whom you can say, “I knew him when...” or “I knew her before...”? Well, I have at least two of those people in my life, and I met ‘em both at Hinton Rural Life Center.

It was 27 years ago. I was the founding pastor of a new United Methodist church in Charlotte, North Carolina. We had, maybe, 150 people meeting in a public school. And, my district superintendent scheduled a mandatory clergy retreat at Hinton Rural Life Center.

My first thought was, “Why do we have to drive all the way to the mountains to have a clergy meeting? We could just meet right here in town!” But, back in those days, I was still a young, obedient clergy person, so I loaded up the car, and I started the long trip up to Hinton.

Three things happened.

First, I noticed that the more I drove, and the closer I got to Hayesville, the more beautiful were the surroundings. I looked around, and I thought, “OK, this might be worth the drive.”

Second, once I got to Hinton, and the retreat got going, I began to experience the peace that comes from leaving pressures and demands behind, and going to a simple place of quiet beauty where you can focus—and hear God’s voice.

And then number three. I think it’s fair to say that my life was changed by that retreat at Hinton Rural Life Center. It was the two famous people I met there -- well, they weren’t famous then.

One of them was Mike Slaughter, pastor of a growing church (at the time) called Ginghamburg United Methodist. This was before the mega-campus, and the books, and the speaking tours, and the Bible study curriculum. At that time, Mike was in a Doctor of Ministry program with a couple of pastors in our district, and he led us in a retreat on effective ministry in the 20th century (and yes, back then it was still the *twentieth* century!).

Mike had a HUGE influence on the rest of my ministry. I'll never forget when he said, "Renewal is God breathed, not program planned." When he talked about the lordship of Christ, the power of Scripture, God's heart for the poor—these principles have shaped my ministry for the last, well, 27 years.

The other now-famous person I met was a young pastor—same age as me and fairly new in the ministry—by the name of Talbot Davis. Talbot is now the author of six books published by Abingdon Press, including a powerful book on preaching called, *Simplify the Message, Multiply the Impact*. Talbot and I became fast friends, and we met regularly to compare notes and encourage each other. We spoke at each other's churches. And, in 1999, when I left that new church I started, I recommended to my district superintendent that Talbot Davis become the new pastor of Good Shepherd United Methodist Church.

Well, all these years later, Talbot is still the pastor at Good Shepherd, and under his leadership they have quadrupled in size. They have a Hispanic ministry, a recovery ministry, and a ministry to the homeless. They've given millions of dollars to missions. And, Talbot is helping men and women all over the world become better preachers.

I admit it. I like to brag about "fame by association." (Have I mentioned I went to college with Michael Jordan?) But that's not the point of these stories. The point is that now, all these years later, I can see how the seeds planted during that clergy retreat at Hinton Rural Life Center have produced a crop that is thirty, sixty, a hundred times more than what was planted!

It's no accident that so many of the metaphors used by Jesus are based in rural life. Seeds being planted. Seeds taking root. Roots bearing fruit. This is what the Kingdom of God is like. It's a seed that becomes a tree. It's a hidden root that bears enormous fruit.

Today I'm a member of the Board of Directors of Hinton Rural Life Center, and I am so grateful to see all the ways that God is using this ministry to plant seeds that bear amazing fruit.



HINTON
RURAL LIFE
CENTER