

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

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## Reflections . . .

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*“Listen! A sower went out to sow.”*

-- Mark 4:3, NRSV

A lot of people think that North Carolina ends at Asheville. I am here to tell you that there is a lot of North Carolina to explore and experience west of Asheville.

This was my discovery when I was appointed as the district superintendent for the United Methodist congregations in the seven western-most counties in North Carolina and the Western North Carolina Conference. In Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Clay, Cherokee, Graham, and Swain counties, I found some of the most wonderful people, inspiring vistas, faithful congregations, and extraordinary places that North Carolina and The United Methodist Church have to offer. One of these extraordinary places is Hinton Rural Life Center in Hayesville.

I first visited Hinton Center shortly after becoming the superintendent of the Smoky Mountain District in which Hinton Center is located. Although I had been in ministry for almost 30 years, I had never been to Hinton Center and knew very little about it. Clay Smith, Hinton’s CEO/President from 1984 to 2008, invited me for a visit. I spent the afternoon with him and some of the staff, touring the campus and learning about Hinton’s history and mission.

I was amazed by the breathtaking beauty that surrounded the cluster of buildings on the top of the hill. The staff who greeted me were some of the most visionary and dedicated people you could imagine. Hinton’s mission to equip the church, especially the rural church, for ministry in the world was done by on-campus retreats, consultations in local churches, and mission projects in the region. The home repair ministry, firewood ministry, community garden, and additional Hinton outreach projects were not only improving the lives of people in the region, but also providing hands-on opportunities for youth and adults from all over the Southeast and beyond to sow seeds of kindness and love.

Since that first visit in 2005, I have been to Hinton Center numerous times. Sometimes I have been there with district clergy working on a project and sometimes looking for a place to rest at the end of a busy day. Sometimes I have been there learning new ways of being in ministry or attending a meeting of Hinton’s Board of Directors. And, sometimes I have been there just

wanting the quiet and beauty that is found from sitting on the porch at Moore Hall or walking the labyrinth. Whatever the occasion that brought me to Hinton, I have always left having been welcomed and nurtured, enriched and inspired, rested and renewed, called and sent forth. Indeed, Hinton Center is an extraordinary place!

When I think about Hinton Rural Life Center, I think about the opening words in the Parable of the Sower. Jesus said, “Listen! A sower went out to sow” (Mark 4:3). This is exactly what Hinton Center has been doing for sixty years. From its campus in rural western North Carolina and reaching into rural communities around the Southeast and across the nation, and, yes, even in some urban areas, Hinton is going out to sow the seeds of God’s kingdom. And, among clergy and laity in small rural congregations and urban mega-churches, the fruits of this sowing are bountiful and evident.

Thanks be to God for Hinton Rural Life Center.



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