

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

Reflections . . .

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The same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.

-- Genesis 32:22-29, NRSV

A few years ago I received a phone call from a church member one day to grab lunch. He wanted to talk to me about a recent mission trip he went on overseas. In our conversation, he said that he really wanted to open that opportunity to more people in our church. Being a youth minister at the time, I shared with him my desire to get the youth more involved with the whole church instead of just the youth group. The natural question was, "How can we combine both of these goals?"

That is when an annual inter-generational mission trip was born.

After a little research, we called Hinton Rural Life Center (about 4 hours from where we were) and told them what we had in mind. Hinton's basic response was, "If you can get them up here, we can take care of the rest." I think they were even more eager to have us up there, because we were going in the winter rather than in the summer during their annual mission trip peak months. We were blown away by both the hospitality that Hinton showed us and also the relationships that they have cultivated in their community as a place you can call if you need help.

Even when I moved to a different church appointment, Hinton was more than happy to work with my new church. They were able to replicate the trip, while also adapting it to the needs of the new group.

My times at Hinton reminded me of the story of Jacob wrestling with God. Not necessarily the wrestling part, but the things that happen before and after. Jacob needed time apart from everyone else so that he could prepare to move on with his group together as one. It was in this time apart from everything else that he had a real, tangible encounter with God, and because of that encounter he was able to lead the group he was with through the next important task.

When I personally think about Hinton, the first thing that comes to my mind is sitting on that hill behind the back porch, looking over the lake and the mountains. It is holy ground. It is quiet. And I always carve out a moment on our trips to make sure I can do it alone, so that I can step away and encounter God where I am -- the scenery around me makes a natural mountain-top metaphor. And, while I can see a few things here and there within our group, the fruits from our time at Hinton really show themselves when we get back to our everyday lives -- the next important task, if you will.

The beauty of our time there is that it is intentionally intergenerational. We split up into groups, not by age but, instead, with the intention of making sure every group has every age bracket in it. Our times of worship are led by people from every age. Even our down time is designed to get everyone together.

Now in the hallways of the church, we see the benefits of all the work. Older adults and youth stop and talk to each other -- not awkward hellos but true friendships. People know each other's names, rather than being faceless waves of different generations. The fruit of the trip -- the fruit that Hinton cultivated with us whether they meant to our not -- is an authentic community in our church.



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