

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

Reflections . . .

February 6, 2021



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HINTON
RURAL LIFE
CENTER

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south. -- Psalm 107:1-3, NRSV*

Greetings friends of Hinton Rural Life Center. I am the Rev. Blair Tolbert and serve as the pastor of Shiloh United Methodist Church in the Carrollton, Georgia, area. I am so thankful to share in this time of reflection, in which we celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Hinton Center and its work, witness, and ministry throughout the generations. I am thankful for the time to share our stories and reflections, as we consider Hinton's impact through "Embracing Our Roots and Sharing Our Fruits." In my own experience, through serving on the Board of Directors, on work teams, and in other ways with the ministries of the Hinton Center, these verses from Psalm 107:1-3 came to mind: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south." The word of God, for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

It was the part in the Scripture about being gathered "from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south" that caught my attention. Hinton has become a hub for bringing generations together from all parts of our country into the mountains of North Carolina, through work teams, retreats, family gatherings, and ministry opportunities.

As I consider the impact of the Hinton Center bringing people from all over the country together to serve and grow in their faith, I thought about my first work team experience. I was with a bunch of clergy from the North Georgia area. We had spent the week working on wheelchair ramps, assisting and finishing other projects. Coming from a construction family, I thought I knew a little bit. Our last project had been a difficult wheelchair ramp build. As we finished the ramp, which had taken us a little longer than it should have, the wife who lived in the home came to check on us. She brought her husband to the door. We had had little interaction with him over the few days, realizing it was hard for him to move around because of his wheelchair. As he and his wife looked out in amazement at the new ramp, with teary eyes, he said in a very low voice, "It will be so nice to leave home a little bit more." We realized in that moment how difficult it was for him to leave his home because they did not have a ramp, even to get to doctors' visits. It was in that moment when we heard that small voice that we realized the power and transformation of the work that happens through Hinton Center.

My engagement with Hinton Rural Life Center grew when I began working in the mountains at Young Harris College, working with youth groups and helping at events. I witnessed the work of Hinton's firewood ministry and how it provided warmth to so many. Through my experience on a work team, through my experience of witnessing youth groups, through my experience of the work of the firewood ministry, it is a testament to the roots that have grown in the community and the roots of faith that

have grown in people's hearts. Through all of this work of many generations, the beautiful fruits that have been produced are endless. Along with so many lives changed, my life was changed.

May we celebrate the work and witness of the Hinton Center – the work of God --over these 60 years. With this 60th anniversary, we celebrate and witness the work of God that gathers us from the north and the south, from the east and the west to do beautiful work for the kingdom of God. To share love, steadfast love. To share hope and redemption. And for that, we say thanks be to God. I am thankful to be a part of the legacy of Hinton Rural Life Center. Amen, friends.

