

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

Reflections . . .

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In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

-- Mark 1:35, NRSV

Hey, my name is Randy Lucas, and I currently serve as pastor of Highlands United Methodist Church in the beautiful Western North Carolina mountains. As Hinton Rural Life Center celebrates 60 years of vital ministry, “embracing their roots and sharing their fruits,” I’m glad to add my voice to the sea of voices bearing witness to the good and faithful work of Hinton Rural Life Center and to offer my own personal reflections concerning how the ministry of Hinton has been a blessing to me.

In the Gospel of Mark, right after Jesus began his Galilean ministry with a flourish of activity -- casting out unclean spirits and healing the sick -- Mark records that “In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). I find great meaning in that simple moment in the life of Jesus.

And, though we don’t know the content of Jesus’ prayer, I can’t help but think that, after a flurry of ministry activity, that this time of prayer would have been an opportunity for Jesus to find spiritual nourishment, rest, and renewal in time set apart for prayer.

That image is helpful to me, reminding me of the challenges of ministry and the need to find times for spiritual refreshment -- times for seeking intimacy with God -- reminding me of the importance of times of prayer -- and of the gift of spiritual retreat.

That’s what comes to mind for me as I reflect on the value of Hinton Rural Life Center’s ministry to me. A few years ago, I decided to add a bi-annual rhythm of self-directed preaching retreats to my vocational life. I believe preaching is the most important thing I do, and yet I’ve recognized through the years that sometimes the demands of pastoral ministry can make it difficult to spend as much time as I should on sermon preparation.

Wanting to become much more intentional in time spent working on my preaching ministry, I decided to carve out time on my calendar each spring and fall, to engage in some prayerful planning around six months of sermons.

I explored different locations for my preaching retreats -- and quickly discovered Hinton Rural Life Center offered the most economical option, and what turned out to be an ideal setting.

Hinton quickly became my go-to location for these preaching retreats -- with different small retreat houses (Hermitage cabins) on the property to choose from. The setting that is really ideal for quiet time away. Each small house is nestled in the woods. They are clean and comfortable. I've found the environment to be ideal for what I've needed. It was just the retreat setting for which I was hoping.

The acreage at Hinton also provides a great opportunity for hiking. When I'm not studying, planning, or writing, I've enjoyed walking down to the lake or heading up the trail from my Hermitage cabin to the outdoor chapel -- another ideal setting for quiet times of prayer and reflection. And, there's an outdoor labyrinth for prayer and spiritual meditation.

I've also found that, just sitting on the Hermitage porch in the woods, with a cup of coffee in my hand in the morning, provides a very ideal setting to quiet my mind, to pray, and to seek communion with God.

I'm grateful for Hinton's support of my preaching ministry, and certainly join in the recognition and celebration for 60 years of service, support, and ministry to the surrounding community and to the Church.

Happy 60th Anniversary Hinton! Thanks for your support of pastors -- for the many ways you resource and serve local congregations and the connectional church -- and for all the ways you reach out and serve the community. I wish you many more years of fruitful and effective ministry.



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