

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

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## Reflections . . .

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*The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*

-- Genesis 18:1-8, NRSV

Greetings, Friends! What a joy it is to share with you today, knowing that our connection is rooted in the wider community of Hinton Rural Life Center. My name is Amy Spivey. I currently live in Troutman, NC, and serve in pastoral ministry with Monticello United Methodist Church in Statesville, NC. I am privileged to be part of the ongoing “Roots and Fruits” anniversary celebration for Hinton’s 60<sup>th</sup> year and am always willing to share about Hinton. My brief reflections in this time and for this celebration emerge because of my formative association with Hinton Rural Life Center and because Hinton is a treasured place for me. In faith, discipleship, appointive ministry, and with family and friends, Hinton has been and remains for me both a place and a community of welcome, of learning, of service, of justice, of gathering, and of joy.

My connection with Hinton Rural Life Center began almost 20 years ago while I was serving in Mount Airy, NC. In partnership with four churches, I helped to form a team who traveled to Hayesville for a summer mission week. And, like many people throughout Hinton’s rich and sustained history, this mission experience was my personal introduction to the place and the community of Hinton. What I didn’t know at that time was that six years later my family would become residents of Hayesville, and, eventually, I would join the staff of Hinton. These special

years brought into sharper focus for me and for my family the significance of Hinton and gave me deeper insight into how important the place and the community of Hinton are.

The physical place of Hinton Rural Life Center on the wooded shores of Lake Chatuge and in the undulant mountains of Clay County, NC, has deep roots, and it is the hub for a much larger and more wide spread community of people. And, in its place and with its community, Hinton is a strong link in what United Methodists call the Connection—a connection that is bound together by God and by God’s people—a connection that creates space and opportunity for life and love and transformation—a connection that offers perspective, sparks inspiration, and gives hope.

When thinking about the place and the community of Hinton, a vivid scriptural image comes to mind. It is an image found within one of the stories about Sarah and Abraham in Genesis. They are two people standing firmly within old age with no children together, and God meets them with a promise that will offer them a seemingly unbelievable future. God and Abraham establish a covenant—a two-way commitment—a covenant rooted in promised life and loving relationship. Hear this brief story as it is told in Genesis 18:1-8.

*<sup>1</sup>The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup>He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. <sup>3</sup>He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup>Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” <sup>6</sup>And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup>Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*

As we are told, Abraham is sitting under the oak trees and is finding refuge in the shade on a scorching hot day. It is here that Abraham, the “servant,” greets three strangers, one of whom he calls, “lord.” And quickly, Abraham springs into action so that he and Sarah can offer hospitality and provide for the needs of the travelers. In this story, clearly, place and community are both integral. When Abraham was willing to sit underneath the shade trees, opening himself up to the world, he meets his lord, and he and Sarah are compelled to respond.

I can’t help but think about the importance of place and community in light of this experience for Abraham. You know the kind of experience of a special place—maybe the kind of experience you have when you’re sitting in a rocking chair on the back porch of the Lodge at Hinton, looking out over Lake Chatuge across the mountains of North Carolina and Georgia—an experience of a place that points you outward and opens you up to the world—that allows you to gain perspective and to see with new eyes.

And, at the same time on that front porch, you have an experience of community where you, like Abraham, meet strangers, strengthen relationships, and shore up the connections that

keep you grounded—an experience that inspires you to spring into action for the sake of others—for the sake of God.

I hope that in these few moments you have been transported to that welcoming porch at the Hinton Lodge and to times when the place and the community of Hinton opened your life up in new and formative ways. As we remember and give thanks for the place and the community of Hinton and celebrate the roots and fruits of Hinton spanning 60 years, I encourage you to reflect on your own experiences of Hinton. How has Hinton made you feel welcome? How have you learned and served through Hinton? How have you gained insight into matters of justice with Hinton? How has Hinton brought you into relationship with others and with God as a special gathering space? And in what ways have you found joy through Hinton?

Our stories and our collective memory are what gives life to the place and the community of Hinton. Let's take the time to share our stories, to tell someone about an experience we had through Hinton, and to invite someone new into the fold so that they, too, might experience life, love, and transformation with the very special place and community of Hinton Rural Life Center. May God bless you and bless Hinton. Grace and peace. Amen.



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