

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

Reflections . . .

April 3, 2021



**HINTON
RURAL LIFE
CENTER**

Rev. Nikki Baten,
Rev. Andrew Baten and Asher!
Western North Carolina Conference
Co-Pastors, Rehobeth UMC
Greensboro, NC

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

-- Romans 8:27-28, NRSV

Andrew: My first experience at Hinton was in high school when my youth group from Florida participated in the summer mission program for two consecutive summers. I had been on other mission trips before, but even as a youth I knew there was something special about the way Hinton was engaging the community. Also, I remember noticing that the food was way better than any other mission trip I had been on! Little did I know that this small town in rural North Carolina would become such a huge part of my life.

Nikki: I spent most of my growing up years in Hayesville, and my family got involved at Oak Forest United Methodist (the church on the road to Hinton) when I was in middle school. Throughout my time in church and youth group there and into the early years of college, I knew about Hinton and the great work it did in the community. I had a number of friends who worked there in different capacities. I know there were church and youth events tied to Hinton, but rather than specific memories, what I remember about Hinton from that time was this kind of larger presence, alongside the churches, that I knew was important and needed.

I got to experience Hinton in a different way when my campus ministry went on a spring break mission trip there during my junior year of college. During that week I experienced firsthand the great work Hinton does, and that work, along with the perspectives of the friends with me, helped me see my hometown differently – with a new appreciation and a new concern.

Andrew: I wasn't on that mission trip, but I did meet Nikki at Gator Wesley (the Wesley Foundation campus ministry at the University of Florida). We got married in Hayesville a few years later, and our

wedding reception was, of course, at the Hinton Center – where our guests got to enjoy some of that amazing food.

Nikki went to seminary at the Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, and during that time we stayed in Hayesville, spending our weekends doing ministry with one of the Methodist churches there. We ended up in Hayesville for six years, and over that time we partnered with Hinton on many occasions, and witnessed the amazing work that Hinton is doing in that community.

Nikki: While I was appointed to Hayesville after seminary, I came to know Hinton as a sort of pervasive force in that community. From home repair to worship services to educational events and collaborative community efforts, Hinton constantly works to better the local community around it, and I don't think we can even imagine how far its effects reach.

We don't live in Hayesville anymore, but the way Hinton engages the community and imagines what could be has shaped my own understanding of what it means to be part of a community. I imagine this is a relationship that will continue to guide the way I live in communities and help churches do the same.

Andrew: Paul tells us in Romans 8 that “all things work together for the good of those who love God.” Looking back on the way Hinton has been interwoven into our stories, I see the hand of God working. We both have all of these experiences at different times in our lives, which woven together challenge us to be involved and invested in whatever community we find ourselves to share the love of God. This is a challenge that will stay with us and bear fruit for years to come.

This is the same work we see Hinton doing day in and day out: Listening to and studying needs and resources, and working them together to create a better community. This – I believe – is God's work.

Nikki: We are so grateful for the many ways Hinton has shaped us and so many others, and we give thanks for the great work God continues to do through Hinton Center.

