

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

Reflections . . .

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HINTON
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[Jesus] also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

-- Mark 4:30-32, NRSV

The first time I came to Hinton Rural Life Center, I was in my second year in ministry. I came out with a group of friends and colleagues as part of our RIOM experience—that’s residence in ordained ministry.

We spent an afternoon splitting wood for the firewood lot, and then the rest of the evening was a sort of retreat—where we spent time in fellowship and community with one another at one of the guest houses on site. We loved time away to serve together, and to relax by the lake. It was my first time out here in the mountains. And it was such a gift! It’s an experience, actually, we all still talk about nearly every time we’re together!

To be honest, before then, I hadn’t heard of Hinton. And I also didn’t know there was so much of North Carolina on the other side of Asheville! And now, here I am, serving as the pastor of First United Methodist Church in Murphy, just down the road from Hinton.

I’m grateful that I’ve been able to get to know the folks and ministries of Hinton a whole lot better. Early on, a member of my congregation told the story about how she was a kid when Hinton was founded, and she remembered how much they helped the local community. Those deep, 60-year-old roots have been an anchor of sorts for people for quite a long time.

Hinton has some staple ministries. For instance, everybody knows and celebrates the free firewood lot. Our youth group has gone over a couple of times and busted up some wood. And,

the youth group from the church where I previously served came out one summer and spent a week doing home repair and learning about rural poverty. It was a profound week for them.

But there some other fruits that I've experienced also. Hinton has been a hub of connection for Methodist churches in our area. We've had multiple meetings on their site, so that meetings and seminars could be streamed for those of us in the far end of the Western North Carolina Conference. And, the staff at Hinton have made it a point to make sure rural faith leaders are connected to opportunities from the state of North Carolina that we otherwise might miss. Just as they are connecting Raleigh to the mountains, Hinton helps connect the mountains to Raleigh.

I've also participated in the Clergy Breakfast for Harm Reduction and raising overdose awareness. That event, coordinated with the NC Council of Churches, has stimulated other conversations. That work and engagement on matters of substance abuse and harm reduction are so important for our community right now. The fruit that is and will come from those conversations will be life saving and life giving in so many ways.

I love the story Jesus tells in the Bible about how the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, that when planted grows to be the biggest of all garden shrubs. And in it there is room for birds to perch in its shade.

I think Hinton is kind of like that. Deeply rooted, bearing fruit, and making room for life to thrive in our local communities.

