

ARTICLE FOR THE VERMONT UCC E-NEWS

At Richmond Congregational Church, we believe that everyone has a 'calling' or a way to contribute to the common good. This is true regardless of whether someone identifies as a Christian or not. So we have come up with a series called 'Spirit Sparks' as a way to lift up and celebrate the many ways people in our community are contributing to the common good in their daily lives. We believe this is a nice outreach to the community, as well as a way for us to learn and listen from people in our town who serve in many ways.

Each month we have someone talk for just 5 minutes or so during morning worship. Some of the people are from our congregation, but many are people from the larger community. That is part of the point--we want to hear the stories of people doing good work out in our community and thank them for what they do.

So far we've hosted the woman who owns a hair salon in town; a nurse; a guy who volunteers for Habitat; and the woman who owns the local bookstore, to name just a few. Coming up we have an artist, a local restaurant owner, and a forester.

Our process is simple: we have drawn up a list of prospects (again, a balance of people within our congregation and those who aren't church attenders). A member of our team makes the ask. So far we haven't been turned down, even by people who don't consider themselves to be religious. After the date is set, we coach them on everything from the suggested time frame, to questions to guide their 5 minute talk. This includes prompts like:

1. What is your 'why' for doing what you do during the week? How does your work (paid or volunteer) express your values and beliefs?
2. What are the challenges? What is hard about it?
3. Tell us a story about a particularly meaningful or significant experience you've had at work.

So far Spirit Sparks has been a great success. Hopefully the people who have spoken have felt appreciated and a little more connected to their calling. Many have expressed gratitude for being asked. And for us within the church, it is a reminder about the power of the ministry of the laity, and how everyday, people in our community are making the world more as God intends.