

Our Common Calvert aims to create future leaders

Posted by [Cyn](#) On 09/20/2019

Prince Frederick, MD -- It started out as small idea four or five years ago. Ken Phelps, the rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Sunderland doesn't remember the exact date. What he does remember is sitting around a table at Panera with other church and community leaders brainstorming ideas on how to reach out to local youth.

From that conversation, Our Common Calvert came into being. Now, four or five years down the road, the organization has been recognized by Maryland's Honors Row program.

Each year, the Honor Rows program selects youth groups and organizations providing extraordinary volunteer and community services to Maryland communities, and recognizes them for their contributions during a regular-season Baltimore Ravens home game.

Members of Our Common Calvert on Honors Row day at a Ravens home game.

While some organizations offer activities to keep kids occupied and others offer service opportunities, Our Common Calvert aims to take it a step further and help develop the future leaders of the county and the maybe the nation.

Phelps says the 'Common' in the organization's name is important. Several area churches have partnered to support the organization, including All Saints Episcopal in Sunderland, Broadview Baptist in Sunderland, and Patuxent United Methodist.

The private group has partnered with Calvert County Public Schools

The group is inter-generational with parents, faith and community leaders, and teachers working with students.

Phelps says, "We come from so many different places but our aim is to build community and leadership for the future. I show up but the students and other other adult leaders come together ... black, white, younger kids."

One of the ways Our Common Calvert helps prepare youth to lead is with their Annual Advocacy Day. Kids decide what issues matter to them most and work with teachers to write testimony in support of or against bills. Students then get the chance to take a trip to Annapolis and meet with legislators face-to-face.

Our Common Calvert members participating in Youth Advocacy Day.

Young people who'd like to learn even more leadership skills can take part in the Highlander Institute "to develop their own skill sets and find their passions on how to organize people for positive change."

Our Common Calvert members participating in the Highlander Institute.

Members have also organized forums to discuss issues like immigration and refugees and gender identity and justice.

Our Common Calvert members also serve the community through activities like home repairs, growing food for food banks, and recent mission trips to Puerto Rico.

Phelps also says the group offers a safe social space for young people just to enjoy each others company. He says the most surprising aspect for him is that that Our Common Calvert has also connected adults from diverse background who want to ensure a bright future for young people.

"Adults... teachers, parents, clergy, we all get something out of it."

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