

## **“Have Faith” Initiative**

### **The Faith Community’s Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak**

#### **Notes from 4/23/20 Meeting (via Zoom)**

Greg Burris opened the meeting and thanked all for participating on behalf of Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Community Partnership of the Ozarks and United Way of the Ozarks. There were 62 participants on the Zoom call.

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Bob Roberts, welcomed the group.

Rev. Chantha Chhim provided the opening prayer.

Rev. Mark Struckhoff provided a brief update on the previous (April 9) meeting, noting that information about the SBA Economic Injury Disaster Advance Loan program, which Commissioner Bengsch referenced during last week’s call, is now posted on the Have Faith Initiative’s web site at [www.uwozarks.org/have-faith](http://www.uwozarks.org/have-faith)

Rev. Struckhoff also summarized a report on the current status and recent trends reported on domestic and child abuse in our region. There is concern that our communities will experience a significant spike in demand as the stay-at-home orders are lifted.

Springfield Mayor Ken McClure thanked the group and provided an update on Springfield’s and Greene County’s “stay-at-home” orders, which both have been extended through May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mayor McClure noted that Kansas City has extended their “stay-at-home” order through May 15, and the Governor will be announcing his phased recovery plan soon. Mayor McClure re-emphasized the need for safety to be the priority.

Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch also thanked the faith community leaders participating in this initiative.

Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement for the City of Springfield, provided an update and noted that notification updates are available via text message; this information is available on the City’s web site [www.springfieldmo.gov](http://www.springfieldmo.gov). Cora noted that the City is working on plans for re-opening certain functions and hopes to announce more by next week.

Clay Goddard, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, provided an update on the status of the COVID-19 outbreak and response strategies. He remains concerned about large-group gatherings, but noted that re-opening is the

elected officials' decision to make. Clay shared his personal feelings about being in the midst of this crisis and received support from the call participants.

Rev. Struckhoff asked participants watch for an email survey that would be distributed soon. The survey is designed to provide feedback to City and County officials from the faith community regarding their feelings about reopening and recovery.

Rev. Struckhoff introduced Michelle Garand, Community Partnership of the Ozarks and the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness. Based on the previous week's discussions around the desire to help address the needs of the homeless, Michelle was asked to provide an update to the group on the work of the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness. Michelle's remarks are enclosed. Michelle's presentation included suggestions of ways the Have Faith Initiative participants can partner with and support the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness, including supporting the Merciful Nights fundraiser and the Merciful Care Kits – both are outlined more fully in the transcript of Michelle's remarks below.

Rev. Struckhoff invited Rev. Christie Love to give an update on the homeless shelters. Rev. Love stated they were working to stand up shelters next week and are seeking facilities, volunteers and transportation. They are seeking to return some services to the homeless population and have been serving around 150 homeless individuals each night at Connecting Grounds.

Tom Faulkner gave an update on the work of the Supply Drive Committee. Tom noted that the committee is organizing a food drive to help replace the food normally collected during Stamp Out Hunger (250,000 pounds of food valued at \$500,000), which helps supply food pantries and feeding sights. The committee continues to pursue a three-pronged approach:

- Collection barrels and donations – some barrels are already out
- “Stuff the Truck” event – working to set a date for this event
- Faith-based food drives – packets are being developed.

Tom noted that the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds has offered space to store the collected food so it can be cleaned, sorted, weighed and disbursed. Various partner organizations and churches are pitching in, including Church of Latter Day Saints, Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri, Convoy of Hope, Mercy Health Systems, and Ozarks Food Harvest. The committee will work with United Way of the Ozarks to determine how best to collect and account for donated funds. KOLR plans to host a one-day telethon to raise donations.

Rev. Jenn Simmons, chair of the Community Spiritual & Mental Health Committee, said her committee is still accepting new members and will meet soon. They are developing a resource list, including best practices for mental and spiritual health, and will post these links on the Have Faith Initiative web site. They are also seeking to partner develop a partnership between faith leaders and mental health professionals, acknowledging that mental health will be a major issue throughout the community's recovery.

Linda Merkling, chair the Coming Together in Faith Committee, reminded the group that the National Day of Prayer will be hosted on May 7<sup>th</sup> and will be live streamed on Facebook with no limit on the number of participants. She will send out the link again. Her committee is contacting various media outlets regarding recognition of “healthcare champs” in our community in early June. Yard signs, a Mayoral proclamation, business and church marquees, and local media are all avenues being pursued. A weekly pastoral prayer video is being considered, along with the designation of a time during each day to “be still.”

Rev. Bob Roberts thanked all involved in the Have Faith Initiative and asked all faith leaders to remember Clay Goddard, our city and county officials, and our healthcare workers during this weekend’s live stream services.

Rev. Struckhoff reminded the participants that the survey would be distributed soon and asked them to complete it. He then thanked Vickie Hicks, United Way of the Ozarks, for her work to support the Have Faith Initiative and distribute the survey.

The next meeting of the Have Faith Initiative will be a Zoom call on April 30, 11:30-12:30. An email invitation will be sent by Vickie Hicks, United Way of the Ozarks.

Rev. Ken Chumbley offered the closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned.

## Michelle Garand's Remarks

Good morning!

I would like to begin by thanking you for coming together as a large faith driven group to address the needs of Springfield residents during this pandemic, and for coming to the aid of the homeless during our recent cold weather episodes. Your quick work and open doors provided the care and compassion we all need during this stressful time.

Through this crisis, our roles within the community have broadened and new partnerships have been developed to meet the ever-increasing need, especially for those who are homeless. Since 1996, Community Partnership of the Ozarks and the City of Springfield have teamed up to facilitate the Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness. This Alliance serves as our community's Continuum of Care – the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) designated regional planning body for coordinating homeless services and funding. We work on a community-wide level with agencies, advocates and individuals to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring in Christian, Greene and Webster Counties.

As a planning body, the Alliance works to identify needs and address gaps within the homeless system of care, directing resources and funding to local agencies that provide direct care. Federal funding to address our local needs tops 1 Million annually and focuses on permanent supportive housing for highest need households, using a housing first model. This means that we work as a system to identify households that are the most vulnerable, with the highest barriers, and connect them with our HUD funded programs. We also ensure that all HUD funded programs meet and exceed federal mandates and performance criteria.

As you can imagine, our system of care is data driven and aims to be as responsive as possible to the identified needs of the homeless population. We work as a collective to understand who is homeless and the causes leading to an episode of homelessness so that we can develop programming and prioritize funding to respond to local needs. For example, we know that we have a dire need for Emergency Shelter. The Alliance has appointed a committee to respond to this need – thank you Brian Fogle for your participation! As the Have Faith Initiative, you have witnessed first-hand the challenges for people with nowhere to go when they need help and support.

To ensure that we create a project like ES and others, we collect information in several different ways – Data and Gaps Analysis for Youth, Veterans, Chronic Homeless and Families. We coordinate the Point in Time count that creates a snapshot of those who are homeless each year in January. Our primary mechanism to know the needs is through our One Door program.

One Door acts as the hub for Coordinated Entry into the homeless service system. The Alliance Partner Agencies work together to streamline access to open units through this

Coordinated Entry System. Our One Door team assesses vulnerability and maintains a prioritization list for access to program beds and services. At this time, we have nearly 500 households on this prioritization list and have identified several needs that will take a community to address.

During this crisis period, the OAEH has established a task force to respond to CDC and Health Department recommendations. Members of the OAEH are working with OEM, HD, City, Mercy, MSU Care and community advocates to create a containment and quarantine plan those who are homeless.

Prevention through containment is optimal and is the primary goal to address current needs through health, hunger, hygiene and sheltering.

We know that homelessness on its own increases vulnerability to infection of COVID-19 and increases the likelihood that the virus will result in longer hospital stays and longer recovery times for those released from hospital care.

Members of the OAEH COVID-19 Task Force estimate that 175 individuals are currently unsheltered and accessing meal sites on a daily basis. Front line meal service providers estimate that they are serving 10,000 meals per week.

Of the 175 that are frequenting our front-line service system, more than half meet hyper-vulnerable criteria or elevated vulnerability criteria, meaning they are elderly, pregnant, HIV positive, and/or have a chronic health condition (COPD, asthma, respiratory disease, cancer, diabetes, and others).

To this end, CPO and the COVID Task Force has launched **Merciful Nights** to help connect the homeless with community resources and establish sheltering in place opportunities through hotel rooms.



Nationally, homeless service planning councils are coordinating hotel/motel stays for the unsheltered homeless. This allows for households to shelter in place and stay connected with basic need services as well as access to healthcare services.

In April, CPO received two funding contributions totaling \$50,000

- o Community Foundation of the Ozarks - \$20,000
- o Mercy Health Foundation - \$30,000

This funding has allowed us to provide hotel rooms for 105 individuals through the month of April.

Merciful Nights will allow us to continue hotel options for those currently placed and to expand placement for those still on the streets.

CPO is seeking additional funding to reach our goal of providing alternate sheltering to 150 total households.

Here are a couple of ways the OAEH COVID-19 Task Force and the Have Faith Initiative can partner to help the homeless:

Merciful Nights –

Community Challenge: Community Partnership seeks to raise funds to provide alternate sheltering through hotels/motels for 150 unsheltered homeless households for 4 weeks.

Business Challenge: Hotel owners and operators are asked to offer rooms at a special rate of \$150 per week for up to 4 weeks through Community Partnership's One Door program.

Merciful Care Kits – to help protect the homeless, we are asking the community to help us create 500 Merciful Care Kits that would include the following items:

- Cloth Mask
- Gloves (if available)
- Hand Sanitizer
- Travel size antibacterial soap
- Tide Pod (optional)
- 16 Quarters for a load of laundry (optional)

We will also include educational material in each kit that will include health and safety information about COVID prevention, what to do if symptoms occur and how to access healthcare if symptoms occur.

Kits will be delivered weekly through the meal delivery programs. A mask exchange program will be implemented where individuals can drop used masks off and pick up a clean mask through the same meal delivery programs. Masks will be washed by community volunteers daily.

Anyone interested in providing Merciful Care Kits can email Amanda Stadler at [astadler@cpozarks.org](mailto:astadler@cpozarks.org)

More information about current resources can be found at [www.cpozarks.org/covid19](http://www.cpozarks.org/covid19)  
For more information about the Ozarks Alliance to End Homeless, please visit: [www.cpozarks.org/endhomelessness](http://www.cpozarks.org/endhomelessness)