

“Have Faith” Initiative

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

Notes from 4/9/20 Meeting (via Zoom)

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Bob Roberts, welcomed the group on behalf of himself and co-chair Rev. Mark Struckhoff

Rev. Michael Overton provided an opening prayer.

Rev. Mark Struckhoff asked Greg Burris, President & CEO of United Way of the Ozarks, to provide a brief recap of how the Have Faith Initiative started. Greg noted that city and county leaders had approached the leaders of Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Community Partnership of the Ozarks and United Way of the Ozarks, which were already coordinating the community’s nonprofit response, and asked them to help coordinate the faith community’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak. These entities recruited Rev. Bob Roberts and Rev. Mark Struckhoff to serve as co-chairs of the Have Faith Initiative. This is the group’s second meeting. The co-chairs are organizing “steering committees” around each of the group’s four tasks, which are:

- Conduct a “supplies drive” to collect and allocate items our nonprofits need most to serve the most vulnerable in our community
- Support our community’s spiritual and mental health
- Determine how our community can best come together in faith during this time of physical distancing requirements
- Serve as a communication conduit, both from faith leaders to civic leaders and from civic leaders to faith leaders

Springfield Mayor Ken McClure updated the group on Governor Parson’s recent statewide order, then asked the group to “stay the course” because the stay-at-home order and physical distancing is working. Mayor McClure then thanked the participants for serving their community in this capacity.

Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch also thanked the faith community leaders participating in this initiative, and noted that churches have been able to figure out how to hold their services using technology.

Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement for the City of Springfield, provided an update on the various communication mechanisms being used to keep the public updated on the status of the COVID-19 response. Cora noted that “we can’t let up.”

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 noted

that our county has (at that time) 76 diagnosed cases, 7 deaths, 51 active cases, and 17 recoveries associated with the coronavirus. Clay reemphasized the importance of physical distancing and asked churches not to host in-person services at this time, recognizing we are approaching Holy Week. Clay stated that he understands this is a “big ask,” but using technology and other ways to worship while complying with the “stay at home” order is critical in our community’s fight to “flatten the curve” and limit the spread of COVID-19.

Tom Faulkner will chair the Supply Drive Committee and gave an update. This group is exploring various options surrounding a three-pronged approach:

- Collection bins at grocery stores
- Drop-off locations
- Area church drives

Tom noted that the number of families being served by Crosslines is up 65% in March, and they are working with fewer volunteers. There will be a need for volunteers. A suggestion was made to allow financial donations to be made when people are conducting online grocery shopping.

Rev. Jenn Simmons will chair the Community Spiritual & Mental Health Committee. She said she will have a report soon. Jenn requested a link to C.J. Davis’ “Mental Health Crisis” webinar that SBJ recently hosted; Greg offered to send it once it is posted and available.

Rev. Linda Merklings will chair the Coming Together in Faith Committee. She noted that the National Day of Prayer will occur on May 7 at 8:30 am and will be streamed live on Facebook. Her committee will look for other ways our community can come together. She expressed her appreciation to community leaders for inviting the faith community to the table for these discussions.

Co-chairs Rev. Mark Struckhoff and Rev. Bob Roberts asked Cora Scott if she would chair the Communications Committee, and she agreed to do so. Rev. Chumbley offered to serve on this committee. The group discussed needing a web page. Greg offered to have United Way of the Ozarks work on providing this page.

Vickie Hicks encouraged all participants to complete the online survey that was included in the invitation email.

The next meeting of the Have Faith Initiative will be a Zoom call on April 16, 11:30-12:30. An email invitation will be sent by Vickie Hicks, United Way of the Ozarks.

Ms. Anitra Appleby offered the closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned.