

“Have Faith” Initiative

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

Notes from 5/14/20 Meeting (via Zoom)

Greg Burriss 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. Greg welcomed all newcomers to the call.

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

Co-Chair Rev. Mark Struckhoff shared some important thoughts. *“Welcome to the Have Faith Initiative! As we open this meeting of faith and community leaders, we are entering a unique and brave space; this is collaborative space where all are invited to participate as brothers and sisters, each made in the image and likeness of God.*

We create this space each week with a commitment to be respectful of the various faith traditions that exist in our community, believing that there is strength in our diversity as we come together in service to our community, and that our own faith is strengthened whenever we respect each other.

We may pray and seek God differently; yet we are all called to pray and to seek God. We may think and talk differently about God; yet God is eternally free, and is not defined or limited by our thoughts or language.

This unique space that we call the Have Faith Initiative is not intended to restrict or undermine any person’s faith; rather flowing out of God’s love for all creation, we come together as a human community in a spirit of respect for each person participating, and by extension, an abiding respect for the faith of that person.”

Carl Haworth provided the opening meditation.

Rev. Struckhoff reviewed a few items from last week’s agenda and encouraged the group to review the notes that are available on the Have Faith website- www.uwozarks.org/have-faith.

Pastor Jenn Simmons, Chair of the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, spoke briefly about the second wave of this crisis being mental health related. Mental health issues are on the rise in our community. She observed that many pastors deal with both spiritual and mental health issues. Pastor Simmons then introduced Andrea Bishop, Executive Director of the Betty and Bobby Allison Ozarks Counseling Center.

Andrea Bishop outlined the services that Ozarks Counseling Center provides. The center operates on a sliding scale; rates for individual sessions are determined by income. The

average session is \$15 compared to \$100+ for traditional therapy. No individuals are turned away due to inability to pay. Last year they served 2,400 individuals, ages 3 and up. They also partner with other agencies when individuals need mental health-related medications.

Andrea then discussed anxiety that is related to the current crisis and that the community will be addressing that for years to come. Andrea will offer a 45-minute seminar via Zoom next Thursday (May 21) at 1:00 entitled *Pandemic Anxiety and Active Listening*. Although many leaders learn counseling methods in seminary, this workshop will revisit the importance of quality listening. Focusing on four points:

- 1) Shut up
- 2) Eyes on the person
- 3) Paraphrase
- 4) Attach a feeling

An invitation to this additional seminar will be sent following the meeting today. The seminar will also be recorded and available on the Have Faith Initiative website.

Rev. Struckhoff invited our local government leaders to give updates.

Springfield Mayor Ken McClure expressed his appreciation to the Have Faith Initiative participants. He gave a brief history of the 1918 pandemic in Springfield. The Springfield Greene County library pulled newspaper articles related to that pandemic. He said that on September 15, 1918, the headlines indicated no flu in this area. Two weeks later on Oct 1., the city issued a state of emergency and closed Springfield for five and a half weeks. That timeframe mirrors what is happening now. The City is watching the data closely and, within a week, they intend to publicize the next steps and recommendations for future phases.

Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch stated that Mayor McClure's comments reflect the discussions occurring at the County. Commissioner Bengsch indicated they don't want to move too fast and thanked everyone for their involvement in this group.

Springfield-Greene County Health Director Clay Goddard stated that he appreciates this meeting each week. He reported that we just hit 105 cases in Greene County and that we are now experiencing slow case counts and slow growth. His department has tested 150 asymptomatic service workers – all test results were negative. His office also tested 31 African Americans -- all test results were negative. They are now reaching out to the homeless, refugee and Latino populations. There are currently enough test kits available. Hospitals are also testing before routine procedures. He indicated we still need to be cautious.

Clay expressed gratitude to the MO Foundation for Health for the lab equipment they funded for COVID testing. He indicated that we are the first lab in Missouri to have this equipment. This will provide tools and data that was not available before.

Clay went on to say that up until this week, they were operating in a crisis mode and that this week they were finally able to sit down and begin planning for the next stages. They intend to

issue robust guidance as the churches move back to seated services. In response to a question regarding retail being open but churches not, Clay indicated that we need to be careful mixing sick and healthy individuals as well as density vs. intensity of situations.

There was a question regarding ways that the Faith Leaders can help to connect Clay with their target communities above. He said that there is some distrust of government in those communities and he hoped that faith leaders could remove some of those barriers.

Cora Scott then reported that she is developing a Road to Recovery Roadmap, a document that will outline the different phases. She said that the City and County officials were trying to communicate with compassion, grace, humility and to listen carefully.

Rev. Struckhoff and Rev. Roberts invited the committee chairs to give updates.

Tom Ryan, co-chair of the Food/Supply Drive Committee, reported that the “Stuff the Truck” event will occur June 19-20, with the times and locations to be announced next week. They will reach out to recruit volunteers soon. He also reported that faith organizations have been hosting food drives and there are food donation barrels in many grocery stores. Tom mentioned that Ozarks Food Harvest has extended their free food to pantries through the end of August.

Rev. Jenn Simmons, chair of the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, announced that mental/spiritual health resources will soon be available on the Have Faith Initiative website. Those resources include best practices and even some videos. She reminded everyone that “It is okay to not be okay.”

Linda Merklung, chair of the Coming Together in Faith Event Committee, said the group is working on a Health Care Appreciation Day in June. They already have children decorating thank you signs to post outside area hospitals and clinics. The Mayor will make a proclamation with some special thanks to the leaders of CoxHealth, Mercy Hospital, Jordan Valley Health Center and Burrell Health. She is hopeful that churches will also include a “thank you” message honoring healthcare workers on their exterior signs.

Linda’s committee is also working alongside Victory Mission to produce some faith videos, where leaders can share an inspirational thought. The Leader will record a one-minute video and then send it to her, lmerkling@sbj.net. Victory Mission will format it for posting on social media. In collaboration with the Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, they are considering a citywide prayer vigil and/or a “be still” moment.

Lastly, Cora Scott, chair of the Communications Committee, is developing materials about the Have Faith Initiative group: who we are, our purpose and upcoming activities. She said her office is getting inquiries into our group and she refers those questions to the website. Those communication materials will also be placed on a shared drive on the website. She hopes to

have a PSA campaign for the June Food Drive and also the healthcare worker appreciation events.

The next meeting of the Have Faith Initiative will be a Zoom call on May 21, 11:30-12:30.

Michael Haynes offered the closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned.