

“Have Faith” Initiative

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

Notes from 5/7/20 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 56 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.

Rev. Duane Hoffman provided the opening prayer.

Co-chair Rev. Mark Struckhoff invited Janet Dankert and Rev. Christie Love to provide updates on the Emergency Shelter Committee and the day shelters.

Janet Dankert provided an update on the Emergency Shelter Committee. She indicated the initiative still needs a sustainable funding source, and timing is of the essence. They have enough funding to keep the vulnerable homeless in motels through May, but not after. Janet thanked the various entities that donated to the Merciful Nights fundraiser. She also indicated they have received and distributed more than 500 masks, but need more.

Rev. Christie Love provided an update on the day shelters. She indicated that 150-200 homeless persons were still living on the streets and are not able to access regular services at this time. Rev. Love thanked the various faith organizations for their support. She indicated they currently do not have a shortage of locations, but do have a shortage of volunteers; she has posted information on her website. They are also in need of transportation in the mornings from 10:00-11:15 am. Any organization with a van and driver available can contact Rev. Love.

Rev. Struckhoff introduced Starr Kohler, Executive Director of SeniorAge.

Starr Kohler indicated that SeniorAge covers a geographic area of approximately 10,000 square miles and has 200 employees. Starr listed the following ways in which the faith community can help:

- 1) Prayer.
- 2) Expanded outreach through SeniorAge’s call-multiplier program. Seniors daily are being bombarded by COVID-related scams and dealing with fears about being isolated and missing important senior-related updates. The call-multiplier

program is a free, opt-in service that will send text alerts or voice messages informing seniors of the latest scams to be watching out for, and when timelines or programs directly impact seniors, they also text or message that to them. It is another evidence that they matter and that a host of advocates are watching out for them. SeniorAge will never sell the contact information of seniors who opt in. SeniorAge is hoping the faith community will encourage seniors to sign up for this free advocacy service –collecting names, numbers, and counties of residence. That's all it takes.

- 3) When faith-based organizations are looking for worthy causes to choose for support (through volunteerism or donations), SeniorAge hopes they will remember their nutrition programs. They are producing meals at an unprecedented rate for more and more senior needs – and are not collecting contributions during their distribution to keep the exchange contactless. For that reason, as well as the hardship COVID-19 has put upon the finances of seniors in other ways (caregivers and family supporters may be out of employment and can't help as usual), they appreciate fundraising projects and contributions on behalf of their senior service.
- 4) They need about 100 ton of gravel to further improve the loading dock where meals are produced. They have raised \$6,000 toward the \$19,000 refrigerated truck to help transport emergency frozen meals to various locations in the state.
- 5) They still need more masks for all our workers. Even though their employees have been on the job since day one, classified as essential workers, they have not benefited from many of the essential worker provisions, such as mask distributions. Yet, on their food production lines, the masks are essential. SeniorAge may already be over the 200,000 meals provided since the onset of the COVID-19 challenge.
- 6) SeniorAge would love to enlist trusted individuals to expand their call reassurance program. Seniors are responding wonderfully to this outreach. A listening ear can make all the difference in spirit and hope.

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

Springfield Mayor Ken McClure expressed his appreciation to the Have Faith Initiative participants, including the personal outreach of support he has received. Mayor McClure said they are watching the numbers closely and have been pleased with what has happened thus far. They want to be as flexible as possible, and they will be making an announcement at 2:00 today. Mayor McClure reminded everyone that the first 21 days are critical, and they will continue to watch the numbers carefully.

Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch stated that Mayor McClure's comments reflect the discussions occurring at the County. Commissioner Bengsch thanked all

participants who responded to the recent survey and indicated the results have been very helpful. He stated the county is participating in the 2:00 announcement.

Springfield-Greene County Health Director Clay Goddard stated that he appreciates this meeting each week. He reported that we just hit 100 cases in Greene County and, while our area is experiencing a decline, the state is not. Clay reported on the results of free testing of 200 asymptomatic “essential workers” last week – there have been no positives reported within this sampling thus far. The Health Department is worked to test 39 African-American citizens, with zero positives thus far. The Health Department is working on a recovery roadmap that they hope to release soon, and restated his department’s interest in being a partner, not a gatekeeper.

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

Tom Ryan, new co-chair of the Food/Supply Drive Committee, reported that the “Stuff the Truck” event will likely occur June 19-20, with the times and locations to be announced next week. He also reported that faith organizations have been hosting food drives and there are food donation barrels in many grocery stores. Tom also thanked the organizations providing food donations.

Rev. Jenn Simmons, chair of the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, reminded the group that this is Mental Health Month and stated that her committee is working to get the word out about available resources. They are developing a resource list, as well as Mental Health Kits for people living in isolation (with a focus on seniors).

Linda Merkling, chair of the Coming Together in Faith Event Committee, thanked everyone involved in the National Day of Prayer event conducted this morning. She said her committee has been collaborating with Cora Scott’s Communication Committee to achieve simple, consistent messaging. They continue to work on a “Be Still” campaign, as well as initiatives to thank our healthcare workers during a week of support.

The next meeting of the Have Faith Initiative will be a Zoom call on May 14, 11:30-12:30.

Kert Parsley offered the closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned.