

“Have Faith” Initiative

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

Notes from 5/28/20 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, United Way of the Ozarks, the City of Springfield and Greene County. There were 52 participants on the Zoom call. Greg indicated that a new link would be sent out for future Zoom calls and to look for that email from Vickie Hicks.

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Bob Roberts, welcomed the group. Then Co-Chair Rev. Mark Struckhoff shared some opening thoughts.

Dr. John Birchett, Second Baptist Church, shared an opening prayer.

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

Rev. Struckhoff then welcomed Jon Mooney with the Springfield Greene County Health Department. Jon reported that there have been 128 confirmed cases, and another 19 probable cases (that had antibody testing to see if they had the virus previously), for a total of 147 individuals. There has been an uptick in the last 11 days of 27 new cases. Thankfully, we are in much better shape to handle those than we were a few months ago because we now have greater capacity. But as individuals and organizations, we must continue to play a personal role in helping to prevent the further spread of this disease. We need to maintain distance, wear masks, and practice good hygiene. The Health Department has been impressed by the support from the faith-based community and how proactive they have been.

Regarding the 150 individuals related to the Great Clips event, so far, they have 22 test results with zero positives. This is good news.

Rev. Ken Chumbley asked if there are any thoughts to making face mask-wearing compulsory. Jon responded that their focus is on maintaining distancing. They continue to remind people to mask, but there are challenges to mask enforcement. He asked everyone to encourage individual responsibility. Jon said that there is some concern that masks may bring a false sense of security for some people. Regarding modifications to the existing order, the plan is to wait three weeks, analyze, and then adjust, if possible. Cora Scott commented that masking has become very political in some areas. The city and county leaders want to make their decisions based on science, and they appreciate the unity this group brings.

Jon added that testing is available for anyone with just one symptom, and it is free. He announced that the National Guard will be at the Fairgrounds on June 4th and 5th to provide free testing for any Greene county resident -- no symptoms required. They are prepared to do 1700 tests. Online registration is available at <https://health.mo.gov/news/newsitem/uuid/912934b4-fa13-408b-a9b7-627db5c1c1e1/increased-testing-capacity-allows-missouri-to-expand-criteria-for-patient-testing>

Question - Can the Health Department trace the newer cases back to their sources? Yes, with all the cases, they have been able to tie back to a source. They believe there has been very little community spread.

Question - Are mobile test sites still up and running? As a reminder, the mobile means that the testing is not on-site at Mercy or Cox. Cox and Mercy operate the mobile site. You can be tested by calling Cox or Mercy, your provider, the hotline, or the Health Department at 874-1211.

Question – Do you have an estimated guess on how long social distancing will last? We need to change our thinking to a new normal. Jon indicated that until we have a vaccine on hand, we need to be mindful. Even if a vaccine is developed soon and then goes through trials, it might be Jan. 2021 before it's available.

Jon concluded by reminding us that Individuals could be fully contagious and not have any symptoms or could be contagious for two days before they develop symptoms. They haven't seen many asymptomatic individuals in our community. Therefore, we need to take measures to protect others as well as ourselves.

Rev. Struckhoff then invited Mayor McClure to speak. He started by saluting Commissioner Bengsch for the Lifetime Achievement award as a public servant by the Springfield Business Journal. The Mayor indicated that he is blessed to work with three excellent civil servants at the county.

This is a critical week considering the step-down last week. The Mayor indicated that by opening up the community, it was a vital shot in the arm for everyone. But he is nervous. The Mayor wants to make sure we take personal responsibility, wear our masks, practice distancing, and wash our hands. Let's make sure we do this right. They are looking at capacity and reminded everyone they did modify the capacity number for faith-based organizations after the initial announcement. He talked about his church and encouraged leaders to consider two numbers 1) capacity and 2) allowing for the appropriate physical distancing.

How long with this last? We don't know. But we need to plan for a while. Mayor McClure has had several conversations with Clif Smart, MSU President, to discuss the University's plans for re-opening in the fall. They are currently planning to spread classes out to allow for physical

distancing and offering more sections. We have to prepare for living in this environment for a while. If we take the appropriate steps, we will be fine.

Next Thursday is the State of the City address, the fourth Mayor McClure has given and the most critical. His team is looking for the right message for the community, and he would appreciate prayers as they prepare.

Rev. Struckhoff then offered the floor to Commissioner Bengsch, who thanked everyone for their kind words regarding the recent award. But as he looks at the folks on this call, he realizes that all of you are more deserving than he is.

The Commissioner said these are good news-times, but with some in trepidation as to what will happen next. He asked that when you look at the dashboard, don't "wig out" over the hump in new cases. As you will recall, three weeks ago, we knew there would be new cases as we opened up. This is not the second peak. We expected these new cases as the rules and regulations were relaxed. We hope this hump will not continue to go up. The Health Department is working hard to make sure that doesn't happen. The County Commission is now looking at the next phase. Commissioner Bengsch then indicated that it is a pleasure to work in such a collaborative manner.

This morning, the Commissioner had a discussion regarding fireworks on the Fourth of July with some of the communities surrounding Springfield. Many communities are postponing events until later in the year. One community was thinking about going ahead with their annual event. They were cautioned to prepare for the crowd that would come if they were the only community to offer that type of event. Would they be ready for the news media as well? We do not want another Lake of the Ozarks-type news story. It is a time for difficult decisions that could impact a community for years to come. He and his team covet your prayers for the right choices to be made for these communities. He concluded by thanking everyone, and God bless.

Rev. Struckhoff then introduced Cora Scott with the City of Springfield. Cora indicated that the Mayor and Commissioner addressed the concerns. Cora then encouraged everyone to watch the State of the City presentation on Thursday morning at 8:15. It will be available on the Chamber of Commerce and the City of Springfield's Facebook pages as well as on Springfieldmo.gov.

Rev Struckhoff then welcomed Tracy Niekamp with the State of Missouri's Long-Term Care Regulation Office within the Health and Senior Services Department. Tracy explained that her department/section completes inspections and re-certifications for long-term care communities across the state. They are currently monitoring close to 1200 facilities. Her staff works very closely with public health agencies and other community partners to address needs in long-term care facilities.

Knowing that everyone is most interested in when these communities will be open to visitors, she wanted to give us an update. This issue is personal to her as her father-in-law is in one of

these facilities, and she realizes the anguish this is causing for families. In March, in preparation, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid provided guidance that indicated long-term facilities needed to close their doors to anyone considered non-essential. This was an effort to try and cut down the exposure to those communities. There are currently 186 facilities with cases (either staff or residents.) Please pray for the staff, residents, and families. They are doing the best they can for their facilities. Tracy indicated that the name of our group, "Have Faith," was appropriate, and this will get better.

They know that homes are anxious to re-open and that residents are experiencing difficulty in not being able to see their loved ones. They also realize that many guidelines will need to be in place. They are working with many groups to come up with guidance to re-open the homes in the safest manner. As communities re-open, but facilities are shuttered, they are evaluating how to minimize the impact going forward. Currently, visitors are limited. Of note, individuals who are at the end of life can have visitors if the appropriate PPE is used.

She doesn't know when these facilities will re-open, but it will be a regional response. Her department will work with local partners to evaluate plans before opening.

Question - Out of the 186 facilities, are any in Greene County? Since March 22, there are three facilities with a case in Greene County.

Rev. Roberts shared that his sister is in a facility that hosted a beauty pageant and provided a video for the family. He thanked homes that were doing such things. Tracy indicated that this has been so hard on the long-term care communities. When they have a positive case, it is so devastating for everyone. Some communities are paying for groceries to be delivered to staff or even paying more because there is such fear for staff to even come into work. They have been working to provide technology such as iPads and cameras so that homes can provide videos and interaction for residents and their families

Question - Are there any commonalities among facilities that have experienced COVID? This virus is unlike anything they have encountered. Tracy has been in this industry since 1991. It is an incredibly evolving virus. What we knew in March is different now. Proper infection control is essential before the virus is present. Diligence in screening and monitoring staff is also critical. Of note, the typical signs, especially in the elderly, are not necessarily there. If a resident is complaining of excessive fatigue, falls, or anything outside of their baseline, then they need to be evaluated. Early detection is vital.

Question - Are masks required in these facilities? Yes, the CDC recommendations are followed. Masks are required for staff and residents when providing care or when near each other. Masking is not needed when residents are alone in their rooms. Some additional considerations may cause exceptions, such as asthma patients, COPD, and those with dementia. In general, yes, as best as they can. Staff also holds each other accountable.

Question - How is testing going in that many nursing homes? Her department is working towards robust testing in facilities and finding ways to get it funded. Currently, they are pushing for those facilities that have had a positive case in the last 14 days to test everyone. They would also like to test in those facilities that request it.

Rev. Struckhoff asked if Tracy would be available to join us again in the future. She indicated that she would be happy to join us again.

Due to time limitations, there were quick reports from the sub-committees.

Tom Ryan, chair of the Food/Supply Drive Committee, said that the June “Stuff the Truck” events were going to be delayed until September since there is currently an influx of food supplied to the agencies and storage would be problematic. Two agencies are now offering mobile food pantries.

Rev. Jenn Simmons, chair of the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, reported that the resource library is now available on the Have Faith Initiative website’s shared drive. (www.uwozarks.org/have-faith) Please share any resources that you have found helpful. Also, Andrea Bishop’s excellent workshop on Active Listening is available on the drive.

Linda Merklung, chair of the Coming Together in Faith Committee, reported that billboards have recently been donated for the June Salute to Healthcare week. She asked that Faith Leaders please consider putting a thank you message on their marquees. She will send out samples, but if interested, you can contact her at Lmerklung@sbj.net. They also need more faith leaders that might be interested in recording a video message; please contact Linda or review the information and messages already shared on the [Have Faith Shared Drive](#) on the website. Thank you to Victory Mission for their help with those videos.

Sister Diane Frederick, Holy Trinity, offered a closing prayer.

The next meeting of the Have Faith Initiative will be a Zoom call on June 4, 11:30-12:30.