

## “Have Faith” Initiative

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

Notes from 6/11/20 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, United Way of the Ozarks, the City of Springfield and Greene County. There were 43 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 and shared some thoughts based on Psalm 139.

Rev. Adrienne Denson-Elwell, Campbell United Methodist, provided the opening prayer.

Rev. Mark 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 website- [www.uwozarks.org/have-faith](http://www.uwozarks.org/have-faith). Then Rev. Struckhoff welcomed Mayor McClure to address the audience.

Mayor McClure opened by requesting prayer for Officer Mark Priebe, that was hit and seriously injured on Tuesday. His prognosis is progressing.

The current phase two order expires on Sunday, June 14. Details around the new phase will be announced on Friday, June 12. So far, the impact of masking and physical distancing has proven beneficial. The Mayor then addressed the protest that had taken place on Saturday. He was pleased that the organizers had reached out to the city to make arrangements. He is appreciative of the police and everyone involved.

Rev. Struckhoff then welcomed Commissioner Bengsch. He explained that as much as we all want all businesses to open, the virus is not gone. Commissioner Bengsch discussed the outbreaks in Northwest Arkansas and mentioned that there is a spike in cases now in the far southern corner of Missouri. He explained that the data is important, and we need to be prepared if the virus spreads our direction.

The floor was then turned over to Springfield-Greene County Health Director Clay Goddard. Clay stated that we are faring well for a community of our size because we have invested in our response. We have a total case count of 184.

Clay discussed the increase of cases in Arkansas/Southern Missouri. He said last week that region had 84 compared to our 19. Washington County, Arkansas (Bentonville) has 2372 cases, and their ICU beds are nearing capacity. Health officials are attributing the spike in that region to the poultry industry. There are many refugees and immigrants in that area. These

communities have language and cultural barriers, as well as a mistrust of institutions. Some believe they will be turned over to the government if they seek treatment, which is not the case. Clay asked the Faith Leaders to help him in removing those barriers in our community. If someone calls the hotline, 874-1211, they will be provided testing at no cost. If someone seeks treatment they will not be turned into immigration.

Last week, the National Guard was at the Fairgrounds, providing testing. In all, 1,004 individuals were testing with zero positives. Clay also talked about the Great Clips incident being a happy lesson in masking. We are now past the 14-day incubation period for those that were exposed by the two stylists. There have been no positive cases related to that exposure.

Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, then spoke briefly. She will post information about masking on the Have Faith shared drive. Cora spoke about the protest that was held last Saturday. She said 95% of the participants were wearing masks. She indicated that the city was appreciative of the organizers who supplied masks and hand sanitizer. She asked that listeners stay tuned for the Phase Three updates released on Friday.

Susan Schmalzbauer w/Missouri Faith Voices was invited to tell everyone about the Let Justice Roll parade that will take place Sunday, June 14. The car parade will start at 2:00 at Evangel University. This is an opportunity to publicly say everyone matters.

Rev. Struckhoff then welcomed Wes Pratt, Chief Diversity Officer at Missouri State. Greg Burris asked Wes the following questions.

Question - As someone who grew up in Springfield, moved away for 50 years, then returned to Springfield, what are your observations and expectations regarding racism (intentional and unintended) and social injustice? How and why is it different now?

Wes spoke about his time growing up in Springfield. He remembered his blackness was offensive to many he encountered. At that time, there was only one African American teacher in the Springfield Public School system. He did have positive influences in the Faith Community and from Professors at Missouri State.

Wes discussed the current state of racism in Springfield. Despite what we are doing to eliminate it, it's still here. He is holding our community to a higher standard and encouraged all of us to do so. This is a time of awakening. We all need to act to change our culture. There is improvement, but there still must be action.

Question - There are multiple faith-based groups coalescing in our community. How can we all work together to drive change?

Wes responded by talking about engaging people in humanity. That we need to develop knowledge and skills to be culturally aware. He encouraged public schools to teach African

American studies. Many students are coming to Missouri State, not knowing their cultural history.

Question - How can we balance the calls for immediate change vs. the need to create (or re-engineer) new systems and frameworks for long-term change? How does the Inclusive Excellence model create long-term change, and could it be implemented community-wide?

Wes encourages our community to adopt inclusive excellence. He recognizes that important conversations have begun but need to continue. He did not feel valued as a young man, and we need to inspire others to value everyone. It's about enhancing our climate and recognizing our biases. What we tolerate may not be intentional but could be insensitive.

Question - How else can the faith community help? What role can the faith community play?

We need to teach people to value everyone. We don't need to divide or polarize anyone. He suggested we try to use the power of discernment. We all need to be on a journey to improve.

Rev. Struckhoff and Rev. Roberts thanked Wes Pratt for his presentation. Community Reports were not given due to time limitations.

The next meeting of the Have Faith Initiative will be a Zoom call on June 18, 11:30-12:30. Clif Smart, Missouri State University President, will be our special guest.

Rev. Ken Chumbley, Christ Episcopal Church, offered the closing mediation and prayer.

The meeting was adjourned.