

“Have Faith” Initiative

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

Notes from 6/4/20 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 45 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 around the social and economic upheaval. Co-Chair Rev. Mark Struckhoff welcomed everyone.

Michael Overton, First Baptist Church, provided the 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 website- www.uwozarks.org/have-faith. Then Rev. Struckhoff welcomed Mayor McClure to address the audience.

Mayor McClure had given the State of the City Address earlier that morning. (<https://cityview.springfieldmo.gov/state-of-the-city-june-4-2020/>) He spoke of how he hoped to deliver a message of hope and encouragement, but that was made more difficult by the national unrest. He is proud of our community and the peaceful protests that have taken place. He spoke of being on a call with other Missouri Mayors and how difficult this has been for the Mayor of St. Louis, where four police officers were shot, killing one. He thanked Chief Williams for the excellent job his officers are doing right now.

The City is already evaluating the new COVID cases, 20 since last Friday, to determine the next phase in the Road to Recovery. He is open to feedback from the faith community. Please contact Cora Scott at cscott@springfieldmo.gov if you would like to provide feedback.

Rev. Struckhoff then welcomed Commissioner Bengsch. He complimented the mayor on his presentation and spoke of expecting the recent rise in COVID cases. The Commissioner expressed concern over protests in other cities and what that might mean for the COVID spread. He reminded everyone to act responsibly.

The floor was then turned over to Springfield-Greene County Health Director Clay Goddard. Clay stated that there are two reasons for our recent bump in cases. 1) The step away from stay-at-home orders and 2) greater access to testing so they now know about more cases.

Regarding the Great Clips incident, he reported that 45 people related to that exposure were tested, and none were positive. He says that proves that masking is effective, since the two COVID-positive stylists did wear masks. He indicated he was slow to adopt masking since it wasn't scientifically proven, but he is now a believer. He said masking should be a part of the formula, not mandating it, but encouraging it. To see the dashboard of current cases in Springfield, visit the dashboard at <https://www.springfieldmo.gov/5068/Coronavirus>.

Cora Scott then spoke briefly. She encouraged everyone to listen to the State of the City address that was recorded. A year ago, Greg Burris, Francine Pratt, Janet Dankert, and herself started discussing how to implement Courageous Conversations around diversity and inclusion in our community. That has now become a priority. She indicated that groups that were interested in protesting were reaching out to the City proactively, and that has helped. She also noted that Francine Pratt has an excellent opinion editorial in today's News-Leader.

Rev. Struckhoff then welcomed Dr. John Jungmann, Superintendent of Springfield Public Schools (SPS), to update the Faith Leaders on what they are doing this summer and fall.

Dr. Jungmann recapped what had happened this spring and spoke of how they addressed three critical needs.

- 1) Food -- In a district that has over 50% of the students on free and reduced meals, the district immediately set up food distribution in the schools. Some students even had food deliveries made to their home.
- 2) Wellness Checks -- Teachers connected with students and families to assess what was needed in the home to continue learning and to make sure students were okay.
- 3) Learning -- Students were provided online options as well as mailed packets. Instruction was provided for three weeks at a time.

In addition to those critical areas, Dr. Jungmann highlighted other services that were provided. They purchased 2000 "hot spots" for students to access the Internet. They also bought devices for K-2nd graders who didn't have access at home. The district implemented a "no harm" fourth quarter. Since some students didn't have daily support as they would in the classroom, they didn't want any student penalized for the shift in instruction. Lastly, they opened childcare sites for healthcare workers in several schools.

School wrapped up on May 21. Spring Commencements will now take place in August.

SPS then shifted to their summer school program, Explore. In 2019, 12,000 students participated in Explore. This year, the June programs were moved online and retitled Explore-to-Go. This past Wednesday, 7,500 students started school. They are also still providing 1,500 lunches at limited sites. In July, there will be three options

- 1) Explore-to-Go online offerings
- 2) Seated classes, limited sizes and only for K-8
- 3) Hybrid, two days virtual, and three days seated

Regarding fall classes, the district is continuing to evaluate options and make plans. School is scheduled to begin August 24. Flexibility will be very important. A question was asked regarding masking. As it now stands, students on buses will be unable to physically distance, so masks will be required. They will screen for temperatures at the entrances to the schools, and once in the classroom, students will no longer need to mask.

Rev. Struckhoff and Rev. Roberts thanked Dr. Jungmann for his presentation and invited the committee chairs to give updates.

Tom Ryan, the co-chair of the Food/Supply Drive Committee, reported that Connecting Grounds is seeking help to feed the homeless that are currently staying in hotels to aid in the containment of COVID. There are currently 150 residents spread among several hotels. Connecting Grounds will continue to feed lunch, but they need help feeding breakfast and dinner. If churches/organizations are interested in helping meet the need, please contact Tom Ryan at tomkryan@aol.com or Rennie Diekemper at rdiekemper@uwozarks.org.

Rev. Jenn Simmons, chair of the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, announced that mental/spiritual health resources are now available on the Have Faith website. (www.uwozarks.org/have-faith) Her committee will be meeting soon to look at adding resources that might help with some of the current unrest.

Vickie Hicks presented as a part of the Coming Together in Faith Event Committee. Vickie demonstrated how to access the shared drive mentioned above, and she played one of the “inspirational message” videos. If you are interested in recording a 60-90 second video, Victory Mission will add the introduction and help to format it. Send your video message to info@victorymission.com. Those messages will be shared on the radio, and you are welcome to post them on your church website. In light of the current protests, her committee is considering postponing the Healthcare Champions events. More information to come.

Lastly, Cora Scott, chair of the Communications Committee, is developing materials about the Have Faith group: who we are, our purpose, and upcoming activities. She said that she has been the bottleneck, but plans to tackle those projects soon.

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

Fr. Jos Tharakan, St. James Episcopal, offered the closing mediation and prayer.

The meeting was adjourned.