

“Have Faith” Initiative”

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

Notes from 7/23/20 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 45 participants on the Zoom call. Greg welcomed all newcomers to the call.

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Jenn Simmons, welcomed the group and spoke about the uncertainty that we face now, but that gratitude can help us cope. She expressed appreciation for this group.

Rev. Michelle Scott Huffman, MSU and Ekklesia Campus Ministry, opened in prayer.

Co-Chair Rev. Bob Roberts welcomed the group and asked Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, to give a brief recap of the systemic racism discussion. Cora told the group that Francine Pratt is drafting a framework for a series of Tough Talks. These talks will provide actionable items that will lead to impactful outcomes. More information on these talks will be forthcoming.

Rev. Simmons then asked members of the audience to add to the chat if they are aware of people needing masks in the community. This group would like to figure out demand before working on supply.

Rev. Roberts then introduced Donna Barton, Public Information Officer for Greene County, for a report. Donna announced that the application period for the Cares Act funding is now open. There will be a press conference on Friday to announce the 30-member council who will evaluate the applications for the \$34 million the county will distribute. She stressed that the county is responsible for the audit by the U.S. Treasury on how these funds are distributed.

Rev. Roberts then introduced Mayor McClure. The Mayor said how proud he is of our community because the Council’s decision on the mask requirement was based on data and not emotion. He believes that the City Council is working collectively and cooperatively. The Mayor is disappointed in the regional response and that our community is significantly impacted by what happens throughout the region.

Mayor McClure turned the floor over to Clay Goddard, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department. There has been significant growth of COVID-19 cases in Springfield. Due to that growth, his department is unable to meet its gold standard” investigation time (within 24 hours.) At the time of the call, there were 836 people in quarantine. His department is pursuing aggressive strategies to help with the

contact tracing. They are recruiting retired physicians, CoxHealth is supplying nurses, and they are adding 37 new staff.

On a somewhat bright spot, nationally communities that have added a masking ordinance have seen a 2% daily decrease in cases. He recently visited with the Health Department in Columbia, Missouri, and their case counts have fallen by half. They had a masking ordinance a few weeks before us.

Clay responded to a question in the chat regarding Nixa restaurants being full and how that impacts our community. Clay said he was worried. We have interactivity between our communities and that he had hoped there would be mitigation by public policy in all communities. Clay added that according to Steve Edwards, CEO of CoxHealth, only 18% of their patients are from Greene County.

Rev. Roberts then introduced Cora Scott. Cora started her comments telling the audience that even though it seems like there is a lot of negative response to the masking ordinance, overall, the community is supportive. She indicated that before the City Council vote, 64% of the public responses, via email and voicemail, were in support. She said that the police are following with education right now. There have been calls to the Citizen Resource Center, but that they are slowing down.

Cora responded to a question in the chat regarding the constitutionality of a masking ordinance. She said that the city could make decisions based on public health. She provided the following in the chat:

- Municipalities have a duty to preserve life and promote legislation that protects the general welfare of our citizens. This duty to preserve life has long been recognized by the United States Supreme Court in numerous decisions such as *Mayor, Alderman & Commonality of City of New York v. Miln*, 36 U.S. 102, 9 L.Ed 648 (1837).

Rev. Roberts welcomed our guest presenters from Burrell Behavioral Health: Dr. Adam Andreassen, COO, and Daniel Ogunyemi, Learning, Development, and Inclusion Partner. Daniel addressed the audience by talking about the need to strengthen the relationship between the faith community and the mental/behavioral health community. Burrell sees first-hand what this crisis is doing to people. He thanked the audience for being open minded for this presentation.

Dr. Andreassen briefly highlighted Burrell's history. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Act. This Act gave federal funding for community mental health facilities. Burrell is one of those facilities. Their mission is to provide community support on mental health issues. In times like these, with COVID-19 and racism, we thrive when we have certainty or less uncertainty. Faith and mental health occupy the same space by providing uncertainty reduction. Burrell is here to be present and available. Recently, the Federal government lifted some requirements, and now Burrell is providing 70% of their services via the phone or telehealth via Zoom.

How can we help those that might be struggling? Dr. Andreassen suggested that we don't shy away from asking people how they are. Ask the hard questions. We need

people to risk saying the wrong thing vs. not saying anything at all. By talking, we engage people. To seek assistance, please visit, <https://www.burrellcenter.com/contact-us/>

Dr. Andreassen answered a question regarding warning signs. He said to look for changes in people's normal functioning. Is there less interest in previous activities? Are they expressing negative thoughts? If you don't know someone well, then ask how they are and if they have access to people that will listen. Don't assume everyone is ok.

Dr. Andreassen said that the faith community has been good at reducing moral judgment related to mental health challenges. He closed by reminding faith leaders that they need to seek help, as well. Selfcare is essential before you hit a wall. It is easy as leaders to absorb the community's stress, and we need to be mindful of our own well-being.

Rev. Roberts thanked Dr. Andreassen and Daniel for their presentation and then turned the floor over for committee reports.

Tom Ryan, with the Supply Drive Committee, said that the "Stuff the Truck" event will be coming in September. They are still feeding the sheltered homeless, and they are also looking at ways to feed those in quarantine. He expressed concern that the homeless are not wearing masks and that many of his volunteers are retirees. They are implementing new food pick-up procedures and will report on those next week.

Linda Merkling, chair of the Coming Together in Faith Committee, announced that we will celebrate local Healthcare Champions the week of August 17. She asked pastors to help spread the news by putting appreciation messages on their marquis, in church bulletins, and on social media. She will share sample messages soon. Cora and her team are working on creating a PSA to show in churches. Linda said that she needs help with ideas/volunteers for a public healing event, and if you have ideas, please reach out to her at lmerkling@sbj.net.

Cora and Linda reminded everyone they are still looking for inspirational videos. Just record your 60-second message on your phone and send it to lmerkling@sbj.net. These messages are currently playing on the Wind-FM 88.3.

JT Patton, Freshwater Church closed in prayer, and the meeting was adjourned.