

“Have Faith” Initiative”

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

Notes from 7/30/20 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 40 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 invited Jaimie Trussell, the new CEO of the Council of Churches, to open the meeting in prayer.

Co-Chair Rev. Bob Roberts welcomed the group and turned the meeting over to Clay Goddard, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department. Clay told the audience that the Centers for Disease Control has sent representatives to Springfield for research. They are working on a story based on the Great Clips incident. They believe Springfield is a data-rich environment, and they have come to share data and to learn from each other.

As of Thursday, his staff is investigating 1141 cases, which has outstripped his department’s ability to do disease investigations. Dr. Blaine, from the Greene County Medical Society, put together a cohort of retired physicians to help. Dr. Clayborn, with MSU Public Health Masters program, also volunteered some Public Health masters students, and Cox also offered 20 nurses to help. Starting today, all will jump in and help. Clay said he is impressed again with how our community collaborates.

Clay was asked if the local numbers are mirroring the national numbers. He said there was a wave of disease nationally and locally last week. We see our surrounding counties also have the same caseload. Clay added that the masking ordinance should show some disease stabilization, and then a downtick is expected.

Another question came from the chat regarding how COVID is affecting lower-class individuals. Clay responded that his department is keenly aware there are barriers for specific populations to seek medical care. They are working hard with marginalized communities to educate. He added that his department has been taking testing to those communities with a mobile unit.

Rev. Roberts told Clay that he prays for him and our city leaders. He then introduced Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch. Commissioner Bengsch gave an update on the \$34 million in CARES funding distribution. Applications are now coming in, and the 30-person review board will be training next week. He reminded everyone that the county is ultimately responsible for how the money is spent.

Rev. Roberts then introduced Mayor McClure for an update from the city. The Mayor started by sharing that the community lost a leader in Larry Freund this past week. Larry was most recently involved in the Council of Churches Foundation Board and had served in many leadership and fundraising positions in the community.

Mayor McClure commented that he is proud of City Council for working collectively and for approving necessary funding for the Greene County Health Department. He is also proud of Branson for passing a masking ordinance. Lastly, he encouraged people to get out and vote on Tuesday, August 4.

Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, was then given the floor. She indicated that masking compliance is high. In the beginning, many calls were coming in regarding masking compliance, but that community education has been successful. Her department is working on PSAs about how to go about various activities while being masked safely.

In conjunction with the Coming Together in Faith Committee, the city will celebrate Healthcare Heroes the week of August 17. She said the theme would be "Standing in the Gap."

Lastly, Cora indicated that there has been increased activity on the Square by the unsheltered community. Due to that activity, the police have an increased presence downtown. In collaboration with the Alliance to End Homelessness and Burrell, outreach teams have been canvassing that area three times a day with resources and directing individuals to One Door to get assistance. Janelle, with Victory Mission, added that the Hanes Corporation had provided them with 1500 reusable masks that they are distributing to those in need.

Before going to the guest speaker, we heard brief reports from the Committee Chairs starting with Tom Ryan, co-chair of the Food and Supply Drive Committee. Tom said the food deliveries to the homeless that are currently sheltered in hotels continues and that the numbers are down. They are delivering food twice a week. He asked the recipients to wear masks when doing their pickups, and that is not occurring. He will now require it. There is still a need for food and volunteers to deliver; an email to the group will be sent with details. Tom also stated that the time is now right for the Stuff the Truck event since many of the charities need the food.

Rev. Simmons, with the Community Spiritual and Mental Health Committee, gave thanks to Deanna Carpenter for her work on the Mental Health Kits and indicated they have been appreciated by those homebound. Deanna needs volunteers to assemble those kits and can be reached at kcarpenter@sbcglobal.net.

Lastly, Linda Merkling, Chair of the Community Together in Faith Committee, asked that churches/organizations/small businesses please put healthcare appreciation messages

on their marquis the week of August 17. She will supply some suggested messages soon.

Rev. Simmons then turned the floor over to Greg Burris to introduce Matt Morrow. Greg shared that today's program was suggested in the survey we sent out a few months ago. Matt Morrow is President of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, and he was invited to speak about our local economy.

Matt thanked the group for the invitation to speak and stated that he admires our faith leaders because he can't think of anything more important than ministering to spiritual needs.

The Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce has 1500 members representing over 50,000 jobs. Matt added that 85% of their members are considered small businesses. In March, his organization reached out to 1200 members to get their take on the crisis. June's unemployment was 7.3%, down from what it was in April and May. He added that many of our local businesses have evolved for this new marketplace. For example, Dynamic DNA pivoted their business and are now making COVID-19 tests. Many are investing today in tomorrow's customers.

Many businesses are meeting regularly to share best practices regarding safety. Some businesses have gone above what is expected to keep their employees and customers safe.

The biggest challenge they are facing right now is Springfield Public Schools' announcement that school will only be in session two days a week. Employers will need to get creative, and this will be a challenge. He hopes that by the end of the first quarter, schools will be able to open completely.

Before taking questions, Matt shared three ways we can help local businesses.

- 1) Shop/buy/meet locally – the need is great.
- 2) Focus on the future
- 3) Be relentlessly positive

Greg then asked if there are channels that Matt can plug into for information to help our community. Matt is getting great information from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. He has a weekly call with 30 peer community leaders to share ideas and best practices.

Lastly, Matt reminded us that solutions come when we collaborate well.

Rev. Roberts then introduced Dave Taylor, a local radio representative from KWFC, Southern Gospel radio. Dave shared that between his station and their sister station The Wind FM, they have 115,000 listeners. Their mission is to give hope and encouragement. Dave closed in prayer, and the meeting was adjourned.