

## **“Have Faith” Initiative”**

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

#### **Notes from 8/6/20 meeting (via Zoom)**

Janet Dankert 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 48 participants on the Zoom call. Janet welcomed all newcomers to the call.

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Jenn Simmons, welcomed the group and invited Rev. Lori Lampert, the Downtown Church, to open the meeting in prayer.

Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, then introduced our speakers Dr. Will Sistrunk, Infectious Disease Program Director with Mercy and Dr. Robin Trotman, Infectious Disease Program Director with CoxHealth.

Dr. Sistrunk spoke first. He thanked the faith community for their support. He has practiced in this community for 25 years. He leads Mercy’s response regionally to COVID-19. There are over 2000 doctors in the Mercy system, and they consider their work their ministry. He announced that there were 101 new cases in this region (which includes surrounding counties.) He sees improvement due to masking. Mercy is making sure they have the necessary supplies, including staffing, beds, and Remdesivir (which is limited and supplied by the state.) They are also watching their ventilator usage and paying close attention to patients, caregivers, and families. Stress levels are high with caregivers. Mercy also shares information with Cox so they can best treat the region. They are working as a team. This disease is a marathon, and they are expecting higher numbers in the fall.

Dr. Trotman with CoxHealth then spoke. He stated that this is a health crisis and really a humanity crisis and that it is not a political crisis or geographic crisis. They are making hard decisions related to risks and allocating resources. Over 100 healthcare workers have tested positive so far. The Healthcare system is stretched, but not taxed. They are vulnerable in some areas, including PPE (not enough stockpile to get through flu season.) His biggest concern is with the people. Physical and emotional stress is a real thing, and it’s here. Currently, there is a husband and wife pair in the ICU, in beds next to each other. He is critical, and she is watching as he goes on dialysis and as code blues are called. There is a lot of fear.

The benchmark positivity rate is 10%, and Cox is at 17%, which is high. The minority of their patients live in Greene County. Masking ordinance is making a difference.

Someone asked a question in the chat whether there are enough tests. Dr. Trotman said there are enough tests. They would prefer to have more of the Real-Time Rapid tests, so that is a vulnerability. He reiterated the need for Remdesivir.

Healthcare leaders still have lots of questions regarding the virus. The science is not as compelling as it needs to be. At this time, they don't know if you can get it again. The evidence just isn't there yet.

Q: How do the patterns correlate to the masking ordinance? Dr. Trotman says it makes a difference. The Great Clips incident told us that. Continue to encourage hand washing. We can stop this in its tracks if we work together.

Q: Is COVID worse than the flu? Dr. Sistrunk stated that the flu is a serious illness, and that's why there is a vaccine. Despite having a vaccine, there are still approximately 40-60,000 deaths nationally a year. The death rate is less than .5% of those that get it. COVID-19 is different. As of right now, the death rate is 3.2% of those that get COVID-19 six times that of the flu. Since there is no vaccine, there is a bigger susceptible group. We will have a strong vaccine program in the future, but not yet.

Dr. Trotman said our immune system is naïve. We get the flu, and we have some antibodies in our system. We have predictably, effective treatments for the flu. We don't have those for COVID. The survival rate is getting better because we now know not to put people on the ventilator so quickly. We are learning additional treatments and interventions that are helping. There are good reasons why some are getting sick. Those that have diabetes, are overweight, smoke, and/or have sleep apnea tend to fair worse when they get COVID-19.

Q: What can we do as Faith Leaders/Non-profits/Government to help?

Dr. Sistrunk responded by stating that the faith community can come together to prevent illness and to care for caregivers. Continue to support masking. Encourage the flu vaccine and the COVID vaccine when it comes out.

Dr. Trotman added, we need to keep the foot on the gas. Early interventions helped, locking down saved lives. Continue to be mindful that we are all at risk. Be careful as churches re-open. Cohort people; if you have Sunday school classes, have those same groups sit together in worship. Same advice for sports, schools, and any in-person events. Continue to adhere to the science, don't back off, be mindful of what we did early. Try to keep this a humanity crisis and not a political crisis. Please follow the Health Department guidelines.

Clay Goddard, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, thanked Dr. Trotman and Dr. Sistrunk for all they have done for our community. Sadly, the city announced the 13<sup>th</sup> fatality today, a woman in her 80's. This is a crisis, not simply a cold. Clay added that there are promising signs that masking is working. He said that we need to focus on the reduction in density in indoor gatherings and still maintaining

physical distancing. He is thankful that Branson and Forsyth also passed masking ordinances. Taney County is taking a beating on case growth, and hopefully those ordinances will help. Clay added that Christian county is seeing case growth since they currently do not have any masking ordinances.

Clay was asked if he thought the virus was here in January and February. He believes the flu was here in January and that Coronavirus may have started here in late February. He then said that the Health Department dashboard is showing a 10% decrease in growth right now. He thanked Cox for supplying volunteers to help with contact tracing, and his department is currently hiring to help with the backlog of cases.

Janet then introduced Commissioner Harold Bengsch. Harold asked that we don't take any current case decreases for granted. He then updated everyone on the CARES Act funding. The 30 volunteer reviewers will start looking at the 255 completed applications soon. They are divided into five teams according to the division of funding.

Mayor McClure then spoke briefly. We are now in week three of the city's masking ordinance. He reminded us that Springfield is not an island, and we still need to be careful when we are out in public.

Mayor McClure then addressed the lawsuits against the City Council, and the Board of Education. The City has been sued over the masking ordinance. The filings are without merit and substance. The city attorney's office is very helpful. He requested prayer for all the leaders involved.

Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, was then given the floor. Cora said that right now they don't have much breaking news, so they have been able to focus on uplifting educational messages. We will celebrate Healthcare Heroes the week of August 17. She said the theme would be "Standing in the Gap."

Pastor Jenn Simmons asked for committee updates. Rennie Diekemper, with the Food and Supply Drive Committee, announced that we will host the Stuff the Truck food drive on September 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. There will be drop-off sites throughout the city. She said that the food deliveries to the homeless currently sheltered in hotels are continuing. They are averaging 40 sheltered individuals a week, and they drop off three-day food boxes at each location twice a week. They are still in need of volunteers and dry perishable food.

Lastly, Linda Merklings, 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. Her community is working with Cora's department to finalize some billboards and public service announcements. The Wind 88.3 FM is playing the motivational messages, and she would appreciate faith leaders recording these and submitting them to her at [imerklings@sbj.net](mailto:imerklings@sbj.net).

Rev. Roberts then introduced Chris Wilson, Adolos Campus Ministry at MSU, to close in prayer, and the meeting was adjourned.