

“Have Faith” Initiative”

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

Notes from 9/17/20 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 38 participants on the Zoom call. Greg welcomed all newcomers to the call.

Co-chair of the Have Faith Initiative, Rev. Bob Roberts, shared upcoming meeting topics: September 24, Election Protocols and October 1, Ways that Faith Leaders are Connecting during this Crisis. Rev. Roberts shared some thoughts around the act of kindness and then opened the meeting in prayer.

Rev. Roberts asked the Have Faith Initiative leaders to share how our group began.

Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement for the City of Springfield, said that March 6 was the first COVID news conference. On March 12, the first case in Greene County was announced. Governor Parsons held his first COVID-19 Press Conference that day. It has been a sprint for our city ever since. Her department began planning how to educate the community. There were many conversations about how to reach out to different sectors of our community. At the same time, they began receiving calls from various pastors throughout the city. The City leaders decided to host a conference call starting with 30 pastors from the Zone Blitz meetings a few years ago. Cora reached out to Greg Burris to help connect the faith community, non-profits, and government officials. The Have Faith Initiative was formed under the new leadership of co-chairs: Rev. Bob Roberts and Rev. Mark Struckhoff. The Have Faith Initiative has expanded to over 125 members and provided significant input in some of the early stages of the policy-making process, including the initial stay-at-home order.

Clay Goddard, Director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, then added that although it has been only six months since COVID-19 hit our community, it feels like six years. His department responded with grace and was thankful that trust and relationships had already been set in place. This is a great community, and the faith community is a part of that. Clay is looking forward to where we are headed. He indicated that we would likely have a rocky Fall, and he asked the Faith Leaders to continue to encourage each other and those in the community. That will help combat the fatigue we are all feeling. He closed thanking this group for their engagement and encouragement.

Greg Burris, CEO United Way of the Ozarks (UWO), then turned it over Brian Fogle, CEO of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks (CFO), and Janet Dankert, CEO of the Community Partnership of the Ozarks (CPO). Brian commented that instead of Thursday, it’s Blursday because since COVID-19 hit our community, all days seem to run together. Brian added that the strong friendship on philanthropy row (CFO, CPO,

and UWO) began with weekly meetings in early February on how they could collaborate. Because of those partnerships, respect was in place already. Initially, all three organizations talked daily. Because of those meetings, a non-profit master needs list was developed. Brian added that we are blessed to live in a community that is collaborative and that our prayers, thoughts, and grace have helped.

Janet Dankert added that she has seen servant leaders emerge, which has taken a load off the City. She is grateful for this weekly outlet. And she speaks for Greg and Brian in saying that we are excited about where we go from here.

Greg Burris added that non-profits were squeezed in the beginning with added work and stress. This group stepped up to help, and he is appreciative of everyone that participates weekly.

Rev. Roberts turned the meeting over to Greene County Commissioner, Harold Bengsch. The county has been very busy with the CARES program, and the 30-member volunteer committee brought another 40 applications to Council for approval this week. Those grants alone totaled \$1,096,000. To date, 400 applications have been submitted. At this time, \$23,664,421 has been approved and will soon be in the community. He also added that the Have Faith Initiative is attracting national and regional attention. Rev Roberts thanked Harold for living out his faith.

Cora Scott, Public Information Officer for the City of Springfield, gave the city report. The Mayor sent his regrets, but he was meeting with the head of the EPA, who is visiting today. The City is now focusing its communications on education. Initially, it was more of a response to the emergent issues, and now there is time for education. The business tool kit is online, and their new emphasis will be educating parents and children. Please visit www.health.springfieldmo.com to find coloring books and other family resources, which will be great for faith communities, too. That website also has educational videos, including some testimonies.

A couple of things that are on the City's radar:

- Emergency Cold Weather Sheltering – there is a great need for more spaces to host the homeless. Please contact Amanda at CPO, 888-2020, to learn more. Locations and volunteers are needed.
- The assurance of safe polls, so people can get out and vote safely on November 3.

Co-Chair Rev. Simmons then ask Christie Love, with the Connecting Grounds, to speak about the documentary *Songs from the Street* that was recently completed by MSU students. The movie is 1 hour and 10 minutes and shows the humanity of our homeless individuals. Viewers will see day-to-day personal struggles. This is a great way to educate your congregation on the homeless population if you want to do a private showing. Some churches are doing a drive-in viewing. To learn more, please contact Christie at christie@theconnectinggrounds.com.

Rev. Simmons then welcome Clay Goddard with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department to dive deeper into COVID-19 statistics and trends.

On September 16, there were 105 cases reported. That brings the total to date of over 5,204 cases since March. Thankfully we are moving downward on average case counts. A few weeks ago, there was a peak of 130 average per day. Monday, September 21, will mark two weeks since Memorial Day, and we know that people gathered to celebrate the holiday.

Our community is currently in the red on the Coronavirus White House Task Force list, and we are the 3rd highest reporting community in Missouri. The virus seeks out vulnerabilities and is moving into rural communities. Sadly, there is no mitigation in those communities. We need to be vigilant and not lured into false senses of security right now. Of note, Joplin ended their face covering ordinance, then had a spike in cases again.

Colder weather is of concern since it usually causes an increase in respiratory viruses such as the flu. The Health Department is watching for trends because with colder weather, people gather inside and celebrate the holidays with family and friends.

There is encouraging news as related to a vaccine. Trust that the local Public Health officials will not sign off on vaccines that have not been properly tested. Clay said he would not sign off on a vaccine that he would not recommend for his mother. The Health Department is also fully aware of the hoops that must be jumped through for proper approval.

Please continue to advocate for flu shots. We don't need another respiratory virus.

Cora's team has also helped to create a new tool kit for parents and students. It even contains information on creating a healthy learning space, especially for those learning from home. You can find that tool kit at <https://health.springfieldmo.gov/5296/Kids-and-COVID-19>. Her department is also preparing messaging for a safe Halloween.

Testing continues in our community, and the National Guard will be back on October 2 for free testing without a doctor's approval.

Of interest, the White House COVID-19 Task Force recommends statewide masking, and the City will soon revisit their policy. Clay will continue to advocate for the masking policy to stay in place. The next public hearing will be Monday, October 5. There will be time for public comments, and the ordinance will be voted on that night. The meeting is expected to run long.

Clay then talked about the new dashboard that will be released next week. The Have Faith Initiative leaders are considering a presentation to this group that will explain the new data.

Rev Simmons thanked everyone for their comments today and the look back over the last six months. The trust we needed to move ahead was in place already.

Tom Ryan gave a report from the Food and Supply Drive Committee.

- 1) Their group did receive a CARES grant for \$57,000 for meals for the sheltered homeless.
- 2) The Stuff the Truck food drive will be delayed again. The pantries don't need food at this time, and space is limited because non-profits are prepping for the holidays.

The Coming Together in Faith Committee is looking for a new chair. If you are interested, please contact Vickie Hicks at vhicks@uwozarks.org

Alyssa Spradlin, Central Christian Church, closed in prayer.