

“Have Faith” Initiative”

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

Notes from 10/1/20 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 43 participants on the Zoom call. Greg welcomed all newcomers to the call.

Rev. Roberts, Have Faith Initiative Co-Chair, welcomed the group and announced that on October 8, we will hear from the Springfield Greene County Health Department as Jordan Coiner will explain their new COVID-19 Dashboard.

Rev. Roberts then turned the floor over to Kert Parsley, James River Assembly of God. Kert shared that they have been meeting in person for some time, and their Sunday morning services are currently at 62% of last year’s attendance. This is considered “at capacity” once you allow for social distancing. They require masks and have temperature checks at the door. He then opened the meeting in prayer

Donna Barton represented Commissioner Harold Bengsch as he is in quarantine. She told everyone about the State of the County report that was covered in the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce’s Good Morning Springfield that morning. Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon made the presentation, and it is available for viewing at [Greenecountymo.gov](https://www.greenecountymo.gov). Donna also updated everyone on CARES act funding. She said they have currently designated \$24.4M of the \$34.4M that has been approved.

Rev. Roberts then welcomed Mayor McClure. The Mayor reminded everyone that at the Monday (October 5) meeting, the City Council will vote on the Masking Ordinance renewal for another 90 days. He expressed his gratitude for the support of this group. He believes the additional 90 days is needed and will hopefully carry us until more news of a COVID-19 vaccine might be available. Collective or individual support is encouraged at the meeting. Cora Scott, Director of Public Information and Civic Engagement, then shared how faith leaders could express their opinion. She said, “To voice your opinion on the draft Phase 3B of the Road to Recovery Order that may extend the mandatory masking requirement through January 9, 2021, call the City Clerk’s Office at 417-874-2460; submit written comments electronically at springfieldmo.gov/councilmaskcomments to be reflected in the City Council meeting minutes; or sign up online at springfieldmo.gov/councilsignup to speak at the City Council meeting on Monday, October 5. The deadline to sign up to speak or leave a comment is 5 p.m. Friday, October 2.”

The first session of Tough Talks will occur on October 1, and there are multiple platforms to participate. Visit <https://www.biz417.com/events/tough-talks/> to learn more.

Clay Goddard, Springfield Greene County Health Department Director, reported that October 1 was the single highest case day. We are second to St. Louis County regarding case volume. They will be reporting more deaths tied to long-term care facilities. To date, 18% of cases were from long-term care facilities. Of note, if someone tests positive in long-term care, everyone is then required to be tested twice a week.

Clay thanked Second Baptist Church for hosting a free test site on October 2 and 3.

Rev Roberts asked Clay about Upward Basketball, a popular sports program that is offered in many area churches. Clay instructed those churches to contact the Health Department for guidance. Younger children are not impacted as much, so not of much concern, but the spectators will be of concern. He suggested that churches consider offering online viewing of the games.

Another question: Due to the high incidents, why are we in stage 3 versus 2 or 1? Clay said that Springfield is an island and that we still must continue our mitigation role. Only three communities in our area have masking requirements - Springfield, Branson, and Forsyth. Clay indicated that the Governor doesn't seem to be considering a statewide Masking Ordinance.

Question: Do we see gaps that need to be strengthened? Clay said the biggest problem is hospital capacity: staffing capacity specifically and not actual beds.

Rev. Roberts then thanked all our weekly speakers and suggested that as faith leaders, we undergird them in prayer

Rev. Simmons welcomed our guest speakers today and asked each speaker to share details about how they are conducting services and connecting with their congregations. She reminded the audience that only 1.1% of Springfield cases could be linked to the faith community.

Rev. Orin Cummings with Messiah Lutheran shared first. His congregation started worshiping in person on July 4. In May, a task force began evaluating their guidelines for in-person gatherings. They are at capacity in their sanctuary because of physical distancing. They have overflow available in a separate space, but it has not been used yet. The task force evaluated church services, small group, quilting gatherings, and the childcare center. They request that members reserve a seat to attend worship using an online program called Pastor's Toolbox. Face masks are required. During the service, the Minsters speak, but only the Cantor sings. They ask that members bring your own cup for communion. All paper items were removed from the pews. His task force has also helped other churches in Kansas City and Illinois with their guidelines. Their Quilting group made face masks for all members and medical workers. Rev. Cummings is meeting outside with those in care facilities. He is also making lots of calls

and writing letters to members. They live stream their services and record them for members to watch later.

Father David Kendrick, St. John's Episcopal Church, shared next. He agreed with everything Rev. Orin said. They started back with in-person services in mid-June. They also have no singing except for the Cantor. He makes consecrated wafers available for communion. Of note, his in-person services are not at capacity, even though they are small. His congregants are older parishioners, so they are very cautious about returning. He also senses that since they are not singing, members are not as interested. Of note, his church was only intended to be a chapel in the 1800s, and as Springfield grew, they would build another building. But North Springfield didn't grow. The most significant change that they have made was in August they offered their first outdoor service at 5 p.m. on Sunday evening. It was their biggest attended event since March. He then decided to continue those outdoor evening services, and in October, they will move their 10:30 a.m. mass outdoors as weather permits. He will monitor people's temperature tolerance. To date, no parishioners have gotten sick. Father Kendrick was asked if they would be streaming their outdoor service. He said they don't currently have the technology to provide a live stream.

Rev. Russel Ewell, Pitts Chapel, shared next. They first zoomed their 11 a.m. service. He liked that people could see each other on the screen. Their difference is that their building is currently under renovation, and they could not meet in the sanctuary even if allowed. They started Pull-up and Praise services outside in the parking lot. The Praise Team pre-records the songs. There has been a good response; just something about bringing people together. They will continue these outdoor events until weather changes. They also offer Zoom Bible study for smaller groups. They already had a ministry in place where one person contacts four to five people each week to check in, pray, and check on needs. This has helped them stay connected. He has learned that social media is essential. Initially, he was reluctant to preach in front of the camera, but he had to get past that because his members asked. Their live stream on Facebook has also brought in new members and even former members from around the country that are now listening again because they can.

Rev. Michelle Scott-Huffman, with First Unity Church, shared last. They have chosen to remain online. Their denomination, Unitarian Universalist, believes the wisdom of science and deeply values human life, so therefore they will remain entirely virtual as long as needed. They are considering remaining online until May 2021. They know they are going to do this for a long time and do it well. Their local committee will examine multiple weeks of case reductions, vaccine availability, and other measures before considering returning. Early on, they learned that their staff was doing things for the service's online production, although that wasn't their strength. They now use lay people for service delivery so the ministers can minister. Sadly, they have had several deaths, and they offered online gatherings of remembrance. They revived the Social Action Committee to call members to ask how they want to remain in the conversation. When they re-inhabit their building, they want to be what they claim to be, inclusive and welcoming. This "working sabbatical" has allowed them to work towards that goal.

Rev. Simmons thanked the presenters and commented that there is nothing normal about the times we are in, but it is good to see how leaders take intention and care to connect. Thank you for sharing. We hope to offer this type of program again.

Rev. Simmons asked Tom Ryan from the Food and Supply Drive committee to share an update. Tom shared that they will continue the feeding program since they received CARES funding. He thanked East Sunshine Church of Christ for supplying and delivering the food during the whole month of September.

If you are interested in the homeless documentary, *Songs from the Street*, please contact Christie Love at christie@theconnectinggrounds.com.

Pastor Chris Ballard, The Story Church, shared their current situation. His church has grown because of online services. They do temperature checks when entering. If members have symptoms or have recently traveled, they are gently turned away. They discontinued all social events, and there is no eating or drinking in the building. Pastor Ballard then closed the meeting in prayer.