

## **“Have Faith” Initiative**

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

#### **Notes from 12/3/20 meeting (via Zoom)**

Greg Burris opened the meeting and thanked all for participating on behalf of the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, Community Partnership of the Ozarks, United Way of the Ozarks, the City of Springfield, and Greene County. There were 39 participants on the Zoom call.

Have Faith Initiative Co-Chair Rev. Jenn Simmons reminded everyone that we now have our meetings every two weeks, our next meeting will be on December 17. She then introduced Rev. Janet Given, South Street Christian Church, who opened in prayer

Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch reported that 80 more CARES applications were approved Wednesday, December 2. He spoke briefly to leave more room for the Health Department report.

Mayor Ken McClure was then introduced. The Mayor requested prayer for the City as they have big decisions ahead. The current masking ordinance runs through January 9. The City Council will meet on December 8 to discuss the ordinance since they only have one study session in December. He also kept his remarks brief to leave more time for the Health Department.

Director of Greene County Health Department, Clay Goddard, then provided an update. The Greene County case count has been flat since November 21. Although that is positive news, it is still a lot of cases. There were 153 new cases yesterday. The day before Thanksgiving, there were 312 new cases. Clay believes we have yet to see the anticipated increase after Thanksgiving. The virus usually takes 7-10 days to present, which means numbers will start to rise.

Clay remains concerned about our local hospitals. They are the real heroes. The workers are exhausted. He requested that we keep them in our prayers.

Later today, they will be reporting 17 new deaths, dating back to late November. When someone passes, the medical examiners must prepare a report; then, the health department reviews it. Therefore, there is a delay in reporting those that pass away. That brings our community total to 216 lost. He doesn’t know the exact number from long-term care facilities, but he said it was the majority.

Positive news on the vaccine front. Moderna is applying for emergency use authorization for their vaccine. Pfizer already has it. He believes there will be two vaccines by the end of the month. The vaccines will arrive in a slow trickle. The first Pfizer batch to arrive in Missouri will be only 51,000 for the entire state. Pfizer will then send 383,000 by the end of the month. He does not know the Moderna numbers yet.

The vaccine will be used in long-term care facilities first. Then frontline health care workers will be next. The lack of vaccines will drive panic for now. A warning, the vaccine is delivered in two doses, and the second dose will trigger a reaction. The Health Department will find positive ways to frame the vaccine reactions so that people will still get the vaccine.

Clay believes it will be early May before the vaccine is available for all. And it will be July before we return to some normalcy. There will be individuals with vaccine hesitancy, and Health Departments will fight this throughout the country during 2021. Because those most at risk will be getting the vaccine early, hospitalizations and deaths will decline.

The Health Department has recently had Strike Team visits. They attended an event hosted by the NAACP and offered on-site testing. They also visited Great Circle and tested children and staff there. Yesterday, they went to Eden Village and tested their staff and residents. They are trying to reach out to those that might have barriers to testing.

The Health Department also changed our quarantine guidelines to mirror the CDC. The quarantine period is no longer 14 days. If someone is symptom-free and tests negative, they will be released after seven days; if they don't get tested, but are symptom-free, they will be released after ten days. Before changing the quarantine protocol, they did get buy-in from Infectious Disease Control at Mercy and CoxHealth. You can watch the health briefing that announces the new quarantine guidelines at <https://vimeo.com/486571111>

Q: How serious a threat is General Assembly's overriding local mask ordinances? If it happened, it would be deadly and devastating.

The Mayor responded that pre-filing of legislation often happens in early December before the session begins in January. These proposals are more targeted toward St. Louis officials. Mayor McClure does not see them becoming law because the Governor advocates local control. City leaders are rallying key constituents from our community, such as university and hospital leaders, to fight it. The Mayor believes the earliest time this measure might be considered is April or May. Hopefully, by then, the disease will be under control.

Clay agreed that it would be terrible. He said it was ironic that the state government doesn't like it when the federal government tells them what to do, but then they are trying to do the same thing to the local government. Clay added that this is a once-in-100-years pandemic; it is not the time to craft this sort of order.

Q: As the city considers masking and what needs to be done to keep our city safe, what initiatives for our homeless will be included in that? I know the CDC explicitly says that homeless encampments should not be disrupted. Doesn't that need to be made explicit in this cold weather season with limited capacity/shortfall in our shelters?

The City has a homeless camp protocol and that relates to private land, as well. When the city is made aware of a homeless encampment, they notify the Community Partnership of the Ozarks (CPO). Then people are sent out with resources to aid those that are unsheltered and the protocol is followed.

Janet Dankert, CPO, added that the sheltering of the high-risk homeless continues, and they have secured funding to last through the Spring. There are currently 250 sheltered in hotels. Our group does provide meals for these individuals. CPO also received funding for case management to help aid these individuals in finding housing.

Also, the city has two sites open for cold weather sheltering. They are hoping to add four more. Also, Catholic Charities of the Ozarks opened the Rancho Hotel, and it provides 16 additional beds.

Q: If a person has already gotten COVID, should s/he get the vaccine? Or should that person wait until others have gotten it? - Clay thinks if the person is in a high-risk population, it will be recommended that they still receive the vaccine.

Q: Clay - I had heard that Great Circle emergency shelter for youth was closed temporarily due to COVID/quarantine can you say what kind of situation would require a shelter to close?

Clay did not know the specifics of that situation. But normally, the reason for closing a shelter would be related to staffing issues. If the staff becomes ill and there are no replacements available, then the shelter will close.

*From the Chat: Missouri Faith Voices is circulating a letter to urge the Governor to issue a statewide masking mandate. This is a letter to show solidarity amongst faith community members and leaders and is being signed by those at statewide, regional, and local levels. Everyone is urged to sign. Affiliation is for identification purposes only. "we are entering one of the darkest moments in the history of the Show-Me State.*

*"In times of crisis, leaders act to protect the vulnerable and to safeguard human life. We are asking you to assist in protecting the lives of vulnerable Missourians by taking leadership and imposing a statewide masking mandate immediately." (An excerpt). Please consider signing here: <https://bit.ly/34hCFB0>*

Q: We've seen mask up promotions everywhere. Can we create something similar for homeless shelter volunteers?  
They are working on that messaging.

Bill Hennessey, Mercy, was asked to give a brief update on the hospitals. Mercy is handling the numbers well, but stress is high. You can see hope in the staff. People are in the roles for which they were called. Mercy is prepping for the vaccine and deciding who will get it first. The Mercy team is also developing plans should the

numbers increase. He sees collaboration throughout the hospital. Bill shared an email from a Nurse Manager that highlighted the level of care patients are receiving.

Q: Clay, do you have any additional recommendations for churches and best practices? I saw Rev. Kendrick say they have closed again. I know many churches are staying online or moving back to online. Is there more info about needed air filtration for spaces and/or sanitizing practices?

Here is the overall guidance: <https://health.springfieldmo.gov/5089/For-religious-services-weddings-and-fune>

Here is a resource on air cleaners/filtration: <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/air-cleaners-hvac-filters-and-coronavirus-covid-19>

Clay finished his comments by saying there is hope, and it is needed more than ever before. Please keep density and intensity at a minimum. Be patient and love one another.

Co-Chair Rev. Roberts turned the floor over to Deanna Carpenter, Chair of the Coming Together in Faith Committee. She announced the ambitious project of 20,000 cards for our local Healthcare Heroes. To learn more about how to participate, visit: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/409054EA8AA2BA6F49-cards>

Also, there is an opportunity to help assemble food kits for the unsheltered this Saturday. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/409054EA8AA2BA6F49-assembling>

Vickie Hicks, United Way of the Ozarks, closed the meeting in prayer