

TO: 2021 Diocesan Convention
From: The Rev. Dr. Maria Evans & Janet Thompson
Date: September 27, 2021
RE: Annual Report from Disaster Preparedness Coordinators

Although Missouri, like much of the rest of this country and the world, has seen increasingly volatile weather in the last few years, with wider fluctuations of temperature and rainfall than experienced in recent history, in the November 2020-November 2021 period, it experienced no long term catastrophic weather events. SEMA and FEMA responded to localized flooding events, particularly in late June 2021, but those efforts were largely confined to infrastructure damage.

Diocesan Disaster Preparedness Coordinator efforts in this time frame were limited to continuing to connect certain populations within the diocese with mental health resources. Available data indicates that the highest rate of completed suicides in Missouri is for men from early 20's to mid-30's, a rate that appears to become even higher with the onset of the pandemic. A program therefore had been developed to provide Mental Health First Aid training to members of faith communities who, in turn, would be able to identify individuals in crisis and, through existing relationships with those individuals, help them connect with mental health resources (either in person or virtually). This training opportunity was made available through a grant from Episcopal Relief & Development.

These resources were under-utilized in the pilot counties (Boone and Randolph), despite the documented need. Therefore, in late 2020 and throughout the first half of 2021, training was provided in predominantly African American faith communities in Boone County to address documented mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic, including clinical depression. "Health Coaches" from the Live Well by Faith program, a program designed to address documented health disparities in the African American community, were provided with Mental Health First Aid training. These trained coaches were also provided with contact information for mental health professionals who could be linked to individuals in mental health crisis.

We believe this model, which is easily replicated in other communities, can help to connect individuals with mental health challenges, to professional resources and thus lower the rates of depression, and completed suicides within the diocese.