

CREATION CARE NOTES

March 7, 2020, Clyde C. Fry, District Creation Stewardship Advocate

2020 CENSUS

Are you hearing about the 2020 census in your church? If not, you should be! The “Faith Communities Census Weekend of Action” will take place March 27-29, 2020, around the period when people will begin receiving 2020 Census notices in the mail. The Census will be in full-swing by April 1.

Recently, faith leaders from across the country convened at the National Cathedral in Washington DC to discuss what the religious community can do to bolster participation in the 2020 Census, a once-in-ten-year’s event that unfolds nationally and is mandated by the U.S. Constitution, (*Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3*) that all of the inhabitants of the nation be counted. This event was part of the Census Bureau’s outreach to the public to raise awareness of the important role of the faith community in gaining everyone’s participation.

The Census Bureau has prepared a [Faith Communities 2020 Census Action Guide](#) which is available at [2020CENSUS.GOV](#). District and Congregational leaders should make use of this informative guide and use its ideas.

Participation in the Census is a civic responsibility, a Christian duty, and an act of stewardship because the data “informs congressional representation [14th Amendment], distribution of more than \$675 billion in federal funding each year, local government planning, business decisions, and more.” (*Steven Dillingham, Census Bureau Director*). It is estimated that each uncounted person can cost a county about \$25,000 in federal funding over the decade.

Unfortunately, there are individuals and groups who stand against the census for a variety of personal, political, social, and economic reasons. By law the Census Bureau is required to protect your privacy and keep your answers confidential. Personal information cannot be used against anyone by any government agency or court, and it can’t be accessed by the police department, DHS, ICE, FBI, or CIA. Census information is safer than your credit card or bank account.

Just as a loss of faith in the Church and what it stands for is the beginning of the death of the Church, a loss of faith in our Nation and what it stands for is the beginning of the death of the Nation. The Church is not perfect and neither is the Nation, but we must keep the faith, for without faith in the system, things will only get worse! A complete and accurate census count is critical for you and your community and the funds and services it unleashes in your community.

CORONAVIRUS -COVID-19

Years ago, I stood in the cemetery of one of the congregations that I served. I looked at grave markers, some that were well over 100 years old. At one point the smallpox epidemic was so severe that it was listed as the cause of death on the grave markers of its victims. Family after family lost loved ones. One family lost five of their children to smallpox in the space of just two weeks! Of course, there were other deadly diseases that took many lives. The “Spanish” flu epidemic (1918-1920) was another killer that was remembered on the grave markers of some of its victims. As I stood there, I wondered how the churches in the area dealt with such devastation. How did they handle so many funerals in so short a time and how did they minister to the families devastated by the overwhelming sadness and shock of so many deaths?

We have lived, for many years, in conditions in which major epidemics have been well controlled, but today we face a threat that may well become a pandemic, lasting over several years, in which many may become ill and some will die. Evidence-based experts are gathering information and expect COVID-19 to mutate and spread widely in the USA. Indeed, it is spreading across the globe and across the United States. The figures are changing rapidly and so are the estimates. It has been sixty years since health officials in the US have used quarantines as a control devise, but that may have to change soon. The United Nations just reported that 300 million students, worldwide, are currently affected by school closings. The giant banking firm J.P. Morgan had 10% of its staff stay at home for a day to test its contingency plan if it is forced to send workers to their homes for long periods. Tech companies like Microsoft, Amazon, and Twitter asked some employees to work at home to test their ability to connect to secured company systems in the event that its offices must close and its employees must work-at-home.

I think that it is important for our congregations to prepare for a possible pandemic. How will we keep in touch with our church families if we are not allowed to visit the sick or group meetings are restricted or even forbidden? How will we minister to the frightened, the sick and saddened? If medical facilities are overwhelmed with patients or limited by lack of equipment and supplies, how can we help those who cannot be cared for within the normal health system? If the Sunday offerings and personal incomes are interrupted because worship and work are shut down or the economy collapses into a depression, how will the money flow and the bills be paid for individuals and for the church? How will the flow of the basic necessities of life be maintained? It may not happen, but what if it does? It seems to me that the “watch and be ready” biblical passages speak to more than their particular circumstances, but represent an attitude about life and service by which followers of Jesus put their faith into action. Pray and hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.