CAMBRIDGE MATTERS

By: Commissioner Steve Rideout

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Dear Readers:

We are facing uncertain times. During this past week or so, our view of Cambridge, Dorchester County, our country, and our world has changed multiple times; and things do not seem to be getting better. More people becoming ill and dying – Millions of jobs lost – more government debt coming – people, through no fault of their own, in crisis.

As I listen to the 24/7 news and the speculation of what is or may be happening, I sense that some are focused on how our national government needs to solve the health and financial challenges we face while others may still think there is no problem. I know that many things will impact how long this crisis lasts and how bad it will be. While government – federal, state, and local - is an important part of keeping us safe, I also know that the many problems that we face will be solved by individuals, groups of individuals, and organizations that will take a piece of the problem and find a solution.

What I see from reports and messages that I receive is that we are a nation that has not forgotten how to get things done. Where someone sees a problem, someone else sees a problem to be solved and finds a solution. People are doing things that make a difference, even if they may never know that they did. Someone I know is making masks for medical personnel due to the reported shortage. Neighbors are helping neighbors who may not be able to help themselves.

We can see some of our restaurants changing to carry out businesses as they try to sustain themselves until the virus scare is less scary. Other restaurants that can’t sustain themselves are making the hard decision to close so that their employees can obtain unemployment insurance to help. For businesses to be successful, those of us who have not lost our jobs and have the financial resources need to find ways to support them during these difficult times. If we don’t, they may not be here or may not want to be here when everything turns around, as we know it will.

We are hearing from the experts that we can help reduce the impact of the Covid -19 virus by staying at home and limiting our contact with others. That makes sense so that we are less likely to be infected or are less likely to infect someone else. I am hearing that there are too many of our citizens who are not following the good advice of the experts and the orders of our Governor. In doing so, they are part of the problem and not part of the solution.

While some may think that all of this is silly, I heard a doctor on TV explain in basic terms how important it is that we stay separated as much as we can. By doing so, she indicated, we could be doing the most important thing we can do to stop the impact of the virus. That may be hard to understand; but by doing nothing, we are doing something that will help reduce the number of people who catch this serious illness, the number of people who die, the length of our quarantine and separation and its costs in financial and personal terms.

While as of today there were no known persons who had tested positive for the virus in Dorchester County, that does not mean that it is not here. The national focus has been and is now on the large cities and states where there are more people. But the virus, even if we follow the good advice that we already know, will arrive here at some point. If we are not doing what we have been asked to do, stay separated to the extent possible and stay home, the impact of the virus could be worse here than elsewhere. The reason is that we do not have the resources available to us that big cities and wealthy counties have.

Through all that we will be facing in the coming months, whether it turns out to be nothing because we did what was asked of us or something serious because we didn’t listen, it will be the doctors, nurses, EMTs, policemen and women, hospital staff, dedicated city and county employees, business owners, and volunteers such as you that will provide the real solutions.

Now people often tell me that I am too optimistic – that I always see the glass as half full rather than half empty. We have in this community too many people who care about it and about the people who live here. We can take the challenges that we face and by working together solve not only this crisis but continue work on another that has plagued this community for over 50 years. We can begin listen to, trust, and support one another in new ways. We can take what is a stumbling block and make it an opportunity to move Cambridge and Dorchester County forward in new ways that will make this an even better community in which to live.

I have shared with some of you the 12 Rules of Mission that I learned from Jim Wallis of the Sojourners Ministry over 25 years ago, when he spoke at an event at the Virginia Theological Seminary. As I listened to him speak that day, I heard his rules as the 12 Rules of Social Change and have tried to follow them since then. Here they are:

**Rule 1 - Get out of the house (or the office)**

**Rule 2 - Start by doing something as that leads to something else**

**Rule 3 - Throw away old labels – its values that matter**

**Rule 4 - Change the culture**

**Rule 5 - Listen to those closest to the problem**

**Rule 6 - Find new allies and search for common ground**

**Rule 7 - You can’t do it alone**

**Rule 8 - Get to the heart of the problem**

**Rule 9 - It’s not easy but worth it**

**Rule 10 - You can do it**

**Rule 11 - Changing the world should be fun**

**Rule 12 - Changing the world is a spiritual task**

While we can’t follow Rule 1 right now in a physical sense due to concerns for the virus, we can do it by phone, email, and text.

How might each of us be a part of the solution to the challenges that we face?

Thanks for reading.

Steve