



May 13, 2020
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Sixth Baptist Church & St. Thomas Community Health Center Form Partnership to Tackle Health Disparities

New Orleans, LA – Today, The Sixth Baptist Church and St. Thomas Community Health Center announced an initiative aimed at tackling long-standing health disparities in New Orleans’ African-American community, which are currently being magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to data revealing that African-Americans have accounted for 60-70% of all novel coronavirus deaths in Louisiana, The Sixth Baptist Church, which has a predominantly African-American membership, and St. Thomas, one of New Orleans’ longest-serving primary health care providers for the underserved, have partnered together with a goal of decreasing health disparities on both personal and institutional levels.

“The coronavirus has had a noticeable impact on our church,” said **Dr. Torin T. Sanders, Pastor of The Sixth Baptist Church**. “We have had deaths within our congregation, as well as multiple people hospitalized. The church has a responsibility to take action any way it can.”

As a key component of the partnership, St. Thomas will provide up to 400 specially-equipped smartphones to The Sixth Baptist Church for distribution to church members. The smartphones, which connect directly to St. Thomas’ medical professionals, will enable medically vulnerable individuals to access primary health care services via telemedicine appointments, from the safety of their own homes. “In the two months that we have been in COVID-19 isolation, St. Thomas has ramped up the use of telehealth services to provide much-needed care and support to our patients,” said **Dr. Donald T. Erwin, CEO of St. Thomas Community Health Center**. “Making video-enabled smartphones available to individuals who otherwise would not have access to this technology is an important step in containing COVID-19 and ensuring that patients can receive the care they need during these unprecedented circumstances.”

In addition, St. Thomas will provide blood pressure cuffs to The Sixth Baptist Church members with hypertension to assist with their self-monitoring, and will also provide ongoing education regarding the prevention and management of chronic illnesses.

The Sixth Baptist Church plans to conduct a congregational health audit to find out more about the health status of its members so that ongoing education and support to prevent and manage chronic illnesses can be tailored to its members. In addition, the church will address policy issues that affect the health and well-being of African-Americans from an institutional perspective, which include advocating for work-related policies for low-wage workers that better protect their health and safety and promote a higher quality of life overall. The Sixth Baptist Church and St. Thomas both recognize the adverse and pervasive impact of institutional racism and poverty as primary factors in the cause of these health disparities. The partnership will begin in June.

For more information, contact The Sixth Baptist Church at 504-525-3408 or www.sixthbaptist.org or St. Thomas Community Health Center at 504-529-5558 or www.stthomaschc.org.

ABOUT ST. THOMAS COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER

St. Thomas was founded in 1987, moved to its current location in 1991, and today has expanded to nine locations throughout greater New Orleans. From its inception, St. Thomas' mission has been to provide health care of the highest quality that is respectful and responsive to the unique needs of its patients, regardless of their ability to pay. St. Thomas is a Federally Qualified Health Center, and provides a range of health care services that includes primary care, pediatrics, mental health counseling, cardiology, optometry, women's health care, and infectious disease services. St. Thomas serves nearly 25,000 unique patients annually via approximately 80,000 patient visits across its service lines.

ABOUT THE SIXTH BAPTIST CHURCH

The roots of The Sixth Baptist Church, founded in 1858, trace back to Coliseum Square Baptist Church. In 1858, African-Americans attended Coliseum Square but were not treated as other members. For example, African-Americans at Coliseum had to sit separate from white members. Not wishing to endure such indignity, a group of enslaved Africans and Free Africans left Coliseum Square and formed their own church on Rousseau street under the leadership of Rev. John Marks. In 1874, the church moved to its current location on Felicity Street. Over its history, Sixth Baptist has had eight pastors. The current pastor, Rev. Torin T. Sanders, Ph.D., has served for over 23 years.

###