Reflections on the Death of George Floyd and Its Impact on Sports Chaplaincy: Navigating Culturally Responsive Care for BIPOC People in Sport

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Abstract: On the evening of 25 May 2020, White Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, killed George Floyd, a Black man, by kneeling on his neck for almost 10 min. Floyd’s death sparked one of the most significant protests in the US. Moreover, it forced a global conversation about reckoning with race, social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion in society. Sport was used as a platform to address many of the social ills that plagued humanity in the US and other nations. Floyd’s tragic death created an alarm for chaplains across vocational strands, including sports chaplains, to immerse themselves in painful and often awkward conversations surrounding race, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Three years after the demise of Floyd, the task that lies ahead is to continue compassionately the work of recognizing harm, promoting reconciliation, and engaging in the collective work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, advancing conversations about moral harm, fairness, relevant theologies, and culturally responsive caregiving strategies must be given primacy.

Keywords: George Floyd; racism; moral injury; culturally responsive care; diversity equity; inclusion

1. Introduction

I have multiple identities in my professional life. I am a former American college football player and coach, a tenured professor at a Carnegie Classified Research 1 institution in the United States, an administrator, a pastor, a chaplain, and a middle-aged family man. The death of George Floyd is personal to me because of my experience as a Black American male in sports as a player, coach, pastor, and chaplain. My experience with the intersection of race, sport, and practical theology began at Ferris State University (FSU), Big Rapids, Michigan, in the mid-1970s. In 1973, my first year in college, the population of Big Rapids was 4500 people according to the Mecosta County, Michigan Clerk’s Office; 1% of the population were Black, and 6% were Indigenous (Chippewa). Enrollment at FSU was around 10,000 students: 475 Black students, 125 Black student-athletes, and 5 Black faculty members. Unfortunately, the University’s community had few, if any, of the commercial symbols that thriving campus communities have. For example, there were no fast-food restaurants on campus. At best, the city and rural county were economically underdeveloped. The saving grace was that there was a Burger Chef restaurant downtown. Unfortunately, one had to navigate through the predominantly White neighborhood on the western campus perimeter to get downtown, where the eatery was located.

Early evening on Sundays, before the sun began to set, a group of Black student-athletes would traverse this neighborhood in search of their final meal of the day, since the cafeteria which served student-athletes closed at 5:00 p.m. Like clockwork, every Sunday, someone from the neighborhood would call the Mecosta County Sheriff’s Department and complain that there was a pack of “colored boys” walking through the area being rowdy. This was far from the truth simply because most of us were from communities of at least 50% Black in the state of Michigan and were painfully aware of race relations in the middle part of the state. So, the Mecosta County Sheriff’s deputies would follow us from
the western part of campus to downtown and park their police vehicles and wait until we had our food and began the journey back to campus. Then, they would start to follow us back to the western campus perimeter. I was always painfully aware that race, geography, and policing were inextricably linked by time, circumstance, and history everywhere in the US. My first experience with racial profiling and with evil exercised at the hands of local police began while I was at college. We always knew as young students that God was ever-present in our lives and would keep us from “dangers seen and unseen”, as we had often heard espoused from the pulpiteers in our respective churches back home. But this was different; the threat of a racially motivated incident triggered at the hands of law enforcement was a grim reality that we all had to cope with. In the final analysis, our circumstance was not meaningfully different from George Floyd’s other than the fact that we navigated our way to stay free and live; unfortunately, he did not.

2. A Brief Bio-Sketch of the Late George Floyd

Who really knew George Floyd prior to that fateful day in May 2020? Despite being demonized and prematurely labeled a petty criminal by the media, George Floyd was a person of sport, an athlete. He was a family man; he had a wife and five children, three of whom were adults. He was six feet, six inches tall and weighed more than 240 pounds at the height of his playing career. He was not the kind of receiver that I would have wanted to encounter running across the middle of the field on a “post pattern”. He was a safety’s worse nightmare—tall, fleet-of-foot, and determined to get to the endzone as the lore about him goes. Despite the labels placed on him after his demise, history cannot change two things: (i) George Floyd was a Christian, and (ii) he was a person of sport—a two-sport letterman in basketball and football who received a scholarship to South Florida Community College (Suddler 2021). He was a Black man who experienced various traumas in life, just like many of the players, coaches, and personnel that sports chaplains work with. On 25 May 2020, the world watched, shocked at the sight of a police officer in Minneapolis holding his knee on the neck of George Floyd for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, including two minutes and fifty-three seconds of which Floyd was non-responsive. Floyd, unarmed, lay handcuffed and prone on the pavement outside a neighborhood grocery store, struggling to breathe as Derek Chauvin and two other officers held him down.

Scholar, theologian, and advocate Michael Eric Dyson in his book, Entertaining Race: Performing Blackness in America (Dyson 2021), recounts the automortology of George Floyd as he prophetically forecasted his impending death. During his final minutes of life, Floyd uttered in sheer exasperation: “Y’all, I’m going to die in here, I’m going to die man . . . I can’t breathe. Please, the knee in my neck . . . I’ll probably die this way. All right, All right. Oh my God” (p. 183). Dyson notes that Floyd “. . . eerily prophesied his fate in a post-mortem declaration as if the death deed was already done. “Tell my kids I love them, . . . I’m dead” (p. 183). Bystanders repeatedly begged officer Chauvin to remove his knee from Floyd’s neck so that he could breathe. Chauvin nonchalantly refused, and Floyd died (Paulson 2020).

The killing, coming in the wake of other killings of Black men and women at the hands of White police officers in various cities across the United States, sparked protests worldwide as people of all races called for change. Yet, strikingly, since the murder of George Floyd, there have been over 250 more unarmed Black people killed by police in the United States (Rahman 2021). Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark, Breonna Clark, Ahmad Aubrey, and Daunte Wright are indelibly seared in the psyches of BIPOC people in America and globally. The term “BIPOC”, in conversations related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, is defined as “those that are Black, Indigenous, and people of color”. BIPOC is a term specific to the United States and is intended to center on the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color (Davidson 2022). The British neo-soul band Sault sums up the sentiment well when they released their album in June of 2020 entitled Rise with the impactful song Uncomfortable. Note the lyrics:
Maybe you’re uncomfortable with the fact we’re waking up
How do you turn hate to love? How do you turn hate to love
Maybe you’re uncomfortable with the fact we’re waking up
Why do you keep shooting us? Why do you keep shooting us?
Oh, the way that you judge me, this is madness.
Oh, I’m praying, I’m hoping, believing, in God’s magic
Oh, everyday is dangerous for me, internal sadness
Oh, I’m praying, I’m hoping, believing in God’s magic, oh, oh

The remaining stanzas of the song are a refrain that asks two piercing questions: (i) Are you upset that BIPOC people are profoundly conscious of the problem of race-related murders? (ii) Why do you [law enforcement] continue to kill people of color? Again, there is an urgent plea for the intercession of God embedded in the lyrics to stop the violence against people that physically looked like the writers of the song. Finally, there is the reality of being of a darker skin hue and having to traverse “controlled spaces” and be “racially ordered”—every day is dangerous for me. And, of extreme relevance is the by-product of this state of oppression: “the creation of internal sadness”. In contemporary terms, this translates into the impact on the mental health and well-being of BIPOC individuals.

As I watched Floyd’s public murder unfold in prime time, I concurrently lamented this inhumane tragedy. But this event also triggered an abiding fear that the same thing could have happened to my friends and family members. Very quickly, I replayed the countless number of times I had conversed with others about encountering the police, the racialization of public and private spaces, and what to do should we ever be stopped. Ultimately, the capstone of the conversation was always a reminder—geography, geography, geography. I, along with other BIPOC parents, must have this unfortunate conversation with our boys and young men. Genesis 49:1–2 reflects the duty of parents and caregivers to keep their sons alive, “Then Jacob called his sons and said: Gather around; I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come. Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel, your father”.

In order to process the events of Floyd’s death, the author informally sought out experienced sports chaplains for timely and much-needed professional development conversations on these and other matters. Each conversation was rife with insights about this slaying and what we should do to move forward. But there was an add-on from the collectivity of chaplains of color. The add-on was two-fold: (i) help players and coaches locate God amid this racial chaos, and (ii) walk with the athletes of color to help keep them alive. It is “The Talk” that authors Jamie Hawley and Derrick Floyd (Hawley and Floyd 2019) say is essential to the survival of BIPOC men. In his role as “surrogate father”, Baltimore Ravens team chaplain Johnny Shelton says that young men of color in this era must have a father figure in their lives, and sometimes it is a person in sports.

3. The Aftermath of the George Floyd Slaying

For many, George Floyd’s death was the penultimate event of 2020, but other factors exacerbated the problem, for example, the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, which created health disparities; the furtherance of a slowing down of the global economy that widened the economic gap; the stalling of the entire sports industry; the indictment of local police departments in the US and beyond for violence against BIPOC people; and the contestation of a national election fueled by bad politics and bitterness. Furthermore, the confluence of these factors pushed the United States and other nations to a nearly unbearably strain in terms of race relations. We saw protests that the US society had not seen since the civil unrest following the assassination of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We saw fire, smelled smoke, and heard voices of dissent that refused to be silenced. As a result, at the end of three-plus years, society is left with a profound moral injury and significant trauma.
4. Moral Injury

Unfortunately, for too many Black people in America (including myself), George Floyd’s violent death brought with it a sense of déjà vu; similarities with countless Black men and women whose lives were taken by those who wielded unearned power over them. What the international community saw in real-time mimicked the horrific violence perpetrated against the Black and White protestors of the civil rights movement in the US in the early 1960s. In the summer of 1968, I vividly recall the police response to protestors and rioters after the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy. These violent deaths paid cruel dividends to communities of color which the world bore witness to hours after the death of George Floyd.

Moral injury is the damage to one’s conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that go against one’s moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct (Bandura 2016; Narvaez 2021). Individuals may also experience betrayal from leadership, others in positions of power, or peers, which can result in adverse outcomes. For example, replaying the death of George Floyd repeatedly via the mass media and social media reinforced a sense of moral injury. What is left is a collective moral injury shared with others. Think of moral injury as the lasting emotional and spiritual impact on a community when those in positions of power commit actions that violate core ethical values and expectations of righteous behavior. Silver (2022) argues, “a community moral injury is a deep soul wound that pierces a person’s identity, sense of morality, and relationship to society”. We should feel morally injured by actions committed to maintain false power structures and by those who choose to linger in descriptions of the wreckage rather than take measures to prevent it. Moral injury is not a burden we should carry alone but one we must share with others so that we all become more robust in the struggle to advance racial equity. By bringing our whole selves to this work daily and sharing our anger, hope, and pain, we create authentic healing spaces and push ourselves and one another to show up and be accountable. In a time of physical distancing, we must work harder to remain emotionally connected and rooted in our righteousness. We must not revert to our silos or concede defeat—in any way, shape, or form.

5. Trauma Experienced by Black Men

Floyd’s murder and a series of subsequent killings of other Black Americans have wrought a heavy toll on the emotional and mental health of BIPOC communities already burdened by centuries of oppressive systems and racist practices. The US has been slow to reckon with the generational impact of racial trauma, a form of identity-related distress that people of color experience due to racism and discrimination (Stafford 2022). We must consider that racial trauma does not always emanate from one event or a single narrative but results in a series of events over time. For example, the late Boston Celtic legend and National Basketball Hall of Famer Bill Russell often talked about the trauma of being one of the early mega-stars in the NBA. Russell would become the target of race-related assaults and undue criticism because of his position on both civil and equal rights (Kidane 2022). More than three years have passed since Floyd’s passing and, in many ways, society is still wrestling with the ramifications. At the onset, many stood in the shallow waters of disbelief that something like a “public murder” could happen in modern-day civil society. But what it signaled is the presence of a never-ending evil in contemporary society—the problem of racism. At the core of this ever-present evil is the “strange” and unsettling silence that has crept in around Floyd’s death, social justice, and the protests that manifested in society and in sports.

While many simply accept that such events happen, others suffer as they cope with the grim reality that this type of phenomenon will continue to occur if evil persists. In his book Dimensions of Evil: Contemporary Perspectives, Terry Cooper (2007) borrows from Methodist activist and theologian Walter Wink (1986, p. 266). Wink states, “Like an undiagnosed disease, it [evil] rages through society, and we are helpless to produce a cure” (p. 11). Or it is simpler to frame this assassination in the manner in which some of the early church fathers,
namely, Augustine, framed evil as something terrible (Lt. Malum) or corrupt (Lt. Corruptio) (Meister and Dew 2017). In the case of George Floyd, the corruption of police officers and the systems that served as a platform for this act led to his demise. Theologian Wendy Farley (1990) was correct when she stated, “...evil as manifest in cruelty, injustice, and suffering is simply ‘tragic,’ particularly if tragedy evokes a sense of pathetic inevitability ... Yet there is an element of the irrational in the evil that evades clear concepts and orderly judgments” (p. 19).

6. Managing Our Emotions about George Floyd’s Death—And Our Guilt

Over the past three years, we have expended vast amounts of time conversing about topics such as color-blindness, Whiteness, White privilege, White fragility, Blackness, Black rage, racism, how not to be a racist, power, embedded discrimination in sports systems, embedded racism in the business of sport, racial reconciliation and, in the case of some, how do I stop feeling guilty about it all? Collectively, in reading circles, corporate or parachurch training, we read books like Ibram X. Kendi’s How to Be an Antiracist, or sociologist Robin DeAngelo’s White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard to Talk About Racism and Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm. Some scanned the pages of Carol B. Helsel’s Anxious to Talk About It: Helping White Christians Talk Faithfully about Racism. For African Americans, John McWhorter’s Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America and Georgetown University-based author, theologian, and public intellectual Michael Eric Dyson’s Entertaining Race: Performing Blackness in America were all lauded as essential reading to start or continue the dialogue about the “metaphoric elephant in the room”—race. For many, these past three years have also been a time for reflection on race and its interface with religion and theology. For example, Nigel Rooms (2022) has reflected on his “Whiteness” and all that it has meant across his life span in an article entitled “God and My Whiteness: A Personal Theo-Biography”. Similarly, using critical theology, Barrett and Marsh (2022) sought to dismantle Whiteness as they examined the proceedings of the Dismantling Whiteness Conference hosted by the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture. Reflecting on the circumstances post-George Floyd is crucial in the conversation about race, religion, and sport, but it also creates a pathway for a more inclusive theology that we use to care for those in sports. Unfortunately, the world is still full of racists; many still deny that they are, and racism adversely impacts BIPOC people (McCoy 2020).

7. Protest and Social Justice

The past three years have ushered in a new era of protest grounded in social justice. In the US, collegiate teams have mounted prominent demonstrations on their respective campuses; players in professional sports organizations such as the National Basketball Association, the Women’s National Basketball Association, the National Football League, Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, and the National Hockey League have also mounted their demonstrative protests and boycotts. Further afield, in entities like the English Premier League, players have halted play and took the knee in support of the family of George Floyd. The protest of Floyd’s death is mysteriously reminiscent of the protests that occurred in the US after the killing of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the demonstration and boycott of the 1968 Olympics orchestrated by renowned sports sociologist Harry Edwards. Unfortunately, the same social conditions that fueled those protests are still prevalent in 2022—police violence, social inequities (i.e., healthcare, housing, employment), and economic status. What remains is a divided society, a schism in social cohesion (including in sport), a concomitant need for racial reconciliation, and new ways of healing morally injured, traumatized souls. Moreover, pain and suffering at some level become eminent (Pinn 2006). Hence, the standing question is how do people in sport, particularly those that tend to be the flock (chaplains), begin to heal those who have been wounded in the aftermath of this tragedy by looking for a meaningful response? We must learn to navigate their care in compassionate, culturally responsive ways.
8. Navigating Culturally Responsive Care for BIPOC People in Sport

An appropriate point of departure relative for devising strategies to bring about culturally responsive care for BIPOC people in sport is the facilitation of open and honest conversation about race. In an ideal world, we would not have to engage in such “hard” conversations, especially about how racial differences might inform the work of sports chaplaincy. Although race has no genetic or scientific basis, it is an important and consequential concept; race matters. In contemporary societies, race is used to establish and justify systems of power, privilege, disenfranchisement, and oppression. What we say about race and how we use race often lies at the core of the evil perpetrated against some, including exclusion, profiling, and critiquing some groups in sports and general society. One of the great lessons about race that we learn from the tragic death of George Floyd is that our inability to reckon with it hinders our ability to communicate about it; thus, race drives fear. Sport has long since been seen as an effective mechanism to remedy numerous social ills, but when sport is coupled with race and fear, different outcomes transpire.

For example, each spring semester for the last nine years at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, I have taught a course entitled Sport and Religion in Global Society in our graduate program. Typically, there are, on average, 16–20 master’s and doctoral level students enrolled in the course. This past year, the racial composition of the class included 16 White students, one Latinx, and one student who self-identified as bi-racial. These students aspire to be sports administrators, chaplains, or academics that teach sports studies/sports management or religious education. This year the book I assigned was Christianity, Race, and Sport by Jeffrey Scholes (2022). Over 16 weeks, we talked about sports luminaries such as Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, George Foreman, Colin Kaepernick, and Serena Williams. We focused on each of their encounters with race, differences, media criticism, Whiteness, Blackness, and the need to surveil Black bodies in sports and how these issues lay in tension with their religious beliefs. In week 11, we talked about Serena Williams, her painful experiences with the chair umpire, and the media who over-scrutinized her thick, Black body, clothing, and comments at the 2018 US Open. I asked the class one question, “In this case, what is the relationship between race and suffering in tennis”. For twelve minutes, no one answered, and I walked out into the hallway, purchased a drink, and returned to a classroom filled with the same uncomfortable silence. Finally, one brave soul softly stated, “We just never have to talk about race”. Yet, post George Floyd and with shifting world demographics, race will continue to matter.

Beyond the conversation about race, people in sport involved with caregiving (e.g., chaplains, social workers, sport psychologist, mental health counselors) must practice the art of caregiving in a compassionate manner. Considering the moral injury and subsequent trauma, much prayer is needed in this work. Anthony Pinn, in his book, Why Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology, reminds his readers that pain and suffering are eminent when it comes to the lived experiences of people of color (Pinn 2006). Unfortunately, some forms of injury and trauma (i.e., violent and race-related) do not readily disintegrate. Instead, they linger and require the balm of compassion. Matthew 14:14 is critical here. The New King James Version of the Christian Bible says, “And when Jesus went out, He saw a great multitude, and He was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick”. What is remarkable about this verse is that it moves us beyond sympathy—understanding from your perspective and empathy—it involves putting oneself in the other person’s shoes so as to provide understanding as to why they may have these particular feelings. But compassion makes us feel that what others think is innate, and we become urgently compelled to remedy their condition. Compassionate care is more than just necessary care because it embodies empathy, respect, and recognition of one’s personhood (Doehring 2015). Nicholas Grier, in his book, Care for the Mental Health and Spiritual Health of Black Men, expressed the essential nature of compassionate care for BIPOC men when he stated:

… spiritual care, counseling, and leadership most effectively nurture survival, liberation, healing, and human flourishing in Black men and society when a
comprehensive approach to care is embodied that takes the experiences of Black men seriously as a starting point. (p. 5)

Grier (2020) further argues “that while suffering and resistance are important for Black people, all human beings, including Black people, want to flourish” (p. 5).

Just because the reporting on the death of George Floyd has tapered off, it does not mean that there are no scars to be reconciled among people in sports. It is critical to acknowledge oppressive systems that re-open wounds. As pastoral theologian Homer Asby, Jr., notes in his book *Our Home is Over Jordan*, “BIPOC people in the 21st century are living as disconnected as they have since the advent of slavery . . . there must be a reconnection to properly re-integrate and assimilate into America’s mainstream” (Asby 2003, p. 103). Chaplains must now weave into their respective ministries a “theology of the disinherited”, as espoused by theologian Howard Thurman’s classic text *Jesus of the Disinherited*. Thurman (1996) interprets the teachings of Jesus through the experience of the oppressed and their suffering. He discusses nonviolent, love-imbued responses to oppression, and sports chaplains must do likewise. What must be added to the arsenal of relevant theologies and pastoral care approaches used by sports chaplains today is an inclusive theology that reflects the suffering and struggle of marginalized people. This theology should embrace a spirit of liberation from the social oppressors of our time and concurrently foster a sense of hopefulness about the future. This new paradigm for caring for the souls of people in sport lies in the intercultural and interdisciplinary nature of sports chaplaincy.

In intercultural chaplaincy work, trust and theological accountability are essential to moving beyond the post-George Floyd pain, especially when working with BIPOC people in sports contexts. Clinical psychologist and pastoral theologian Carrie Doehring argues that “we [chaplains, pastoral counselors] both must be willing to listen to people’s painful narratives/stories attentively”. She argues that,

A narrative approach [stories] is about assessment: comparing theological meanings that emerge from care conversations with historical, biblical/sacred textual, and global theologies. Prematurely, historical and contemporary religions will close down emotional and spiritual struggles. Such struggles often de-center care seekers because their suffering questions ultimate beliefs and sacred values. A compassionate and respectful care relationship can provide a dedicated space for exploring new meanings. (p. xv)

Like Doehring, African American pastoral theologian Edward Wimberly (2019) places a high value on listening to the stories of people of color in crisis. In his book *Recalling Our Stories*, he encourages caregivers to dispel myths about those that struggle because of deep wounds to their humanity. He urges chaplains and clergy to unpack the heartbreaking stories as a place to begin the journey toward spiritual replenishment, for God desires the wounded to be renewed (p. 5). To accomplish this task, the chaplain must be theologically and culturally competent.

9. Cultural Competency and Sports Chaplaincy

In the work of chaplaincy, cultural competency is pivotal. Cultural competence has three major components: awareness, sensitivity, and competency. Cultural awareness is the recognition of the nuances of one’s own and other cultures. Cultural sensitivity suggests that there is an understanding of the needs and emotions of your own culture and the culture of others. Being culturally competent implies the ability of individuals to use academic, experiential, and interpersonal skills to increase their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between groups. Moreover, cultural competency implies a state of mastery that can be achieved when understanding culture.

Relatively, another vital dimension of cultural competency is illustrating a concern for the BIPOC chaplains in sport who are linked to those that are suffering by race, class,
gender, and other social categories. One of the silent implications of the Floyd tragedy is that in some chaplaincy circles, many believe that greater attention has been placed on understanding the burden of chaplains of color who share in the weight of the tragedy. Chaplain Cheryl Giles of the Harvard Divinity School argues that chaplains of color live “invisible lives” in the depth and breadth of the contextualized ministry provided to the people they serve. She further elucidates that

Chaplains of color care for their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being while caring for others experiencing pain, anguish, and suffering. In many ways, these chaplains struggle with a ‘triple whammy’ as they provide caregiving in unchartered waters: people of color and a caregiver during times of heightened racial tension and violence, feeling invisible and, in some cases, disrespected. (p. 1)

Furthermore, Giles (2022) surmised that “chaplains of color who don’t work in settings where there are large populations of BIPOC people may struggle with issues of belonging and feeling invisible”. These feelings are genuine.

10. Chaplaincy Innovation Lab

The Chaplaincy Innovation Lab (CIL) is one entity that strongly emphasizes DEI, including professionally managed conversations about race and chaplaincy. In the last two years, we have orchestrated multiple initiatives celebrating diversity among chaplains and the people we serve. For example, CIL has intentionally introduced a section on its website entitled This is What a Chaplain Looks Like. It allows for chaplains to post their photographic images and bios to highlight their work with multiple sectors of chaplaincy. It features Black, Latinx, Asian, and LGBTQIA+ chaplains. Similarly, CIL has made available a series of webinars relating to the work of BIPOC chaplains. Moreover, CIL has published an excellent series of e-books that focus on diversity and apply to the sports chaplaincy context. Their titles include Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Care Conversation Circles: Experiences of Chaplains of Color; and Trauma and Moral Injury: A Guiding Framework for Chaplains. CIL extends its commitment to DEI by sponsoring research related to diversity in chaplaincy. For example, there is a new online reader entitled “Black American Chaplains: An Online Reader”, which chronicles the experiences of Black chaplains across sectors. In light of all of this, how do we move forward in the aftermath of this tragic death?

11. Moving Forward

As we lament the tragedy of George Floyd’s death, chaplains must seize the opportunity to “Know better and do better” and by being more aware and “woke”—alert to injustice and discrimination in society, especially racism and by incorporating this into our service to others. First, people involved in sport must be intentional when it comes to fighting racism and its related social maladies. At the core of progress is intentionality. What chaplains say and what they do matters. Second, the conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that are occurring globally must continue and cast light on the DEI challenges in the world of sports. The discussion cannot simply be “shelved” as if all is well; now, we can move forward. That said, we should not misinterpret the post-Floyd calm as peace after the storm because, in reality, further storms of dissent are approaching. Race relations are still a significant problem globally.

Sports chaplains must also acknowledge that “representation matters”. We must “see” Black and brown faces in those spaces that matter in sports, including sports chaplaincy. Seeing sepia-colored faces is critical to both the authenticity of intent and as a catalytic step toward reconciliation. As we begin to (re)examine how chaplains in the general population and across sectors of chaplaincy work (e.g., sports chaplaincy), the way in which non-BIPOC chaplains support the work of BIPOC colleagues becomes pivotal. There is a considerable gap in cross-cultural training that must be addressed considering the diversity or lack thereof in sports organizations globally. In this era, we must think about how we effectively train and equip all chaplains, including sports chaplains. We should
think critically about pastoral assessment and diagnosis when working with people in sports. I believe this new paradigm should embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion (Fetzer Foundation 2020). Additionally, in this era, to meaningfully serve people in sports, we must consider our place in inter-professional teams, including clinical social workers (McCoy 2020), psychologists, and mental health professionals. Finally, we must give substance to including the roles of ally and advocate for those demonized, dis-inherited, minoritized, marginalized, and simply “othered” instead of being “neutral”.

12. Conclusions

The death of George Floyd, a sportsperson and Christian, was an international tragedy. His untimely and brutal death was embedded with violence on multiple levels—racial, physical, emotional, spiritual, and community. For as much as many of us would wish to forget this regrettable incident passively, Floyd’s death serves as a poignant reminder that race remains a global problem and must be acknowledged as such.

This is not only an acknowledgement of a tragic incident as one of social injustice, but also an acknowledgment of the reality of moral injury and personal/collective trauma to BIPOC people and their respective communities. The depth and ramifications of this injury will not go away rapidly. It will remain long in the general psyche, thus forcing a conversation about how sports chaplains and others who care for the bodies and souls of people of color in sports must exercise their advocacy and their ministries. As a point of departure, we must collectively consider current sports chaplaincy training models and the extent to which they embrace diversity and contextualize helping skills (e.g., assessment, diagnosis). Caregivers in sports that are not BIPOC must acknowledge the importance of stories or narratives that impact BIPOC persons in sports. Most importantly, we must remember, regardless of our roles in serving others in sports, that compassionate hearts and actions are essential to progress and healing.

The great hope is that we, as a “beloved community” of sports, would continue to address matters such as race, contextualized theology that undergirds social justice, and the profound need to address physical, spiritual, and organizational violence perpetrated against BIPOC people in sport. But, unfortunately, we cannot press the “mute” button on this problem because it will not go away. When the angry voices of protestors are muffled, the fires that emblaze the streets of cities where open dissent is now suppressed, and the quest for answers to racial reconciliation, dissipate. At the end of the day, the problem of the confluence of race, religion, and sport does not evaporate. Inevitably, we must muster the courage to address the issue in meaningful ways.

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**Notes**

1. For the purposes of this paper, all racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. For example, the use of “Black” and “White” instead of “black” and “white” per APA 7th edition. See “Spelling and capitalization of racial and ethnic terms” located at APA 7th Edition online.

2. Johnny Shelton (Team Chaplain, Baltimore Ravens) in discussion with the author, June 2022.

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