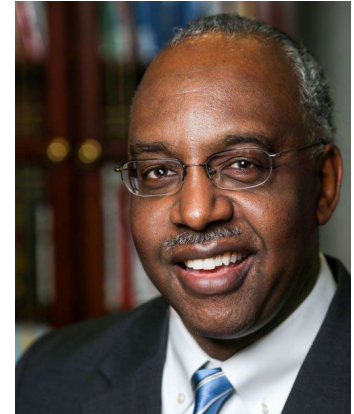


A Reflection by William Pryor

Catholic Health Executive Vice President, Chief Administrative Officer

My heart has been heavy since I heard and read about George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. The facts surrounding these deaths are horrifying, but not surprising to me. What may be different is the nationwide reaction to George Floyd's death and the ensuing protests and unrest. For the past several days, I have spoken to family, friends, and college classmates. We discussed the many ways to affect change, but I believe it starts with one-on-one discussions and learning about our "back stories."



Job titles can be deceiving; one might look at my title and assume many things. **I want you to know that while I am proud to work at Catholic Health and take my servant leader role seriously, I am still a black man in America and know that what happened to George Floyd can happen to me.** I have witnessed and experienced racism in many forms throughout my life, yet my parents, family and faith have supported me.

When I was ostracized by some of the coaches as the only black swimmer on the Dartmouth College Swim Team, my dad (a Dartmouth alum) said, "Get up, swim faster and move on." When I once interviewed and was offered a position, only to have the hiring manager tell me that the organization is not ready for me, I heard the same refrain, "Get up, work harder and move on." I share this tiny bit of my life experience not for sympathy, but to let you know that each of us has arrived at this point in time with a different set of experiences.

In Fayetteville, North Carolina, where I moved from to be here in Buffalo, there is a homeless shelter called Operation Inasmuch. It was aptly named because Operation Inasmuch refers to the Bible verse: *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me* (Matthew 25:40). I think of the George Floyd incident in this manner. Perhaps God chose George Floyd, not because he was a famous celebrity, powerful politician or wealthy athlete; perhaps God chose George Floyd, an ordinary citizen a bit down on his luck (as we all have been at one time or another), to be His "chosen one," to teach all of us, at this very moment, that we have truly lost our way! We have lost our humanity, our love and respect for one another; we have lost sight of what it truly means to be a Christian.

So what can we do? We need to listen! We have demonstrated throughout the years, and most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, that Catholic Health is a caring place where we listen to each patient and put their needs first. **When we listen to each other, stereotypes no longer make sense, and shared stories become the norm. When we listen to each other, the world becomes smaller and we realize that George Floyd was someone's son, brother, father, husband, just like your son, brother, father, husband.**

Perhaps we can all view this moment as a call to action. What can I do, how can I be better at listening to the cries—sometimes silent, sometimes audible—of those who continue to be misunderstood and, thus, mistreated in this society? Each of us can listen and act!