

## Transforming Trauma to Trust: A Prophetic Model of CPE Supervision in the Age of #BlackLivesMatter

Danielle J. Buhuro

Leviticus Johnson was a forty-one-year-old African American male who enrolled in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at Advocate South Suburban and Trinity Hospitals (Chicago, Illinois) to meet his seminary's requirement for earning a master of divinity degree. This unit of CPE gave Leviticus an opportunity to reflect on his personal history and gain self-awareness. After much reflection, Leviticus discerned that his personal history was filled with much grief. The oldest of three children, Leviticus's parents had died within two years of each other. On his deathbed, Leviticus's father, a retired lieutenant in a local police department, made Leviticus promise to be "the man of the house now" and care for his younger siblings.

Leviticus entered CPE with the goal of defining his specific pastoral calling. By mid-unit, Leviticus's pastoral strengths were revealed. He discerned that his pastoral gifts included compassion, sensitivity, social justice/advocacy, teaching, and the ability to assess dynamics in group settings. Thus, Leviticus began to discern earning a PhD after completing his master of divinity degree and walking in a ministerial career path as semi-

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nary professor. In addition to revealing his pastoral strengths and call to ministry, by mid-unit Leviticus's pastoral encounters had enlightened his self-awareness about a particular growing edge. Initially upon entering CPE, Leviticus presented verbatims in which he struggled to engage in relationships with certain peers and hospital staff. Leviticus found it difficult to enter into trusting pastoral relationships with his European American peers in the CPE group along with European American medical staff of the hospital's interdisciplinary team and European American staff chaplains in the mission and spiritual care department. An African American peer observed this reoccurring pattern and brought this growing edge to Leviticus's attention during an interpersonal relationship (IPR) session.

In response, Leviticus reflected, in both group and individual supervision, about his past life experiences with European Americans, particularly police officers. With transparency and vulnerability, Leviticus revealed that he had suffered much as the victim of police brutality. Leviticus recounted about five times when he was unlawfully arrested, but never convicted, because of police harassment, which Leviticus expressed was especially difficult for him to understand in light of his being the son of a high-ranking police officer. Thus, during his CPE internship, Leviticus found it difficult to trust his European American peers, hospital staff, and spiritual care department chaplains.

Leviticus's unfortunate life experiences are not new to me as a CPE supervisor. Since 2010, I've supervised dozens of African American students. I've heard stories similar to Leviticus's several times before. As an African American woman, police brutality has also touched me personally, as I have five brothers who have been victimized by law enforcement. In my own life, I can remember several occurrences of police harassment that I experienced as a CPE resident student. When traveling to the hospital of my residency program, I had to commute through a particular neighborhood surrounding the hospital that had a history of racial discrimination. During my residency, police officers would unlawfully pull me over while I was driving my car through this particular neighborhood. By the conclusion of my residency program, I had been pulled over almost ten times. As police brutality, especially towards African Americans, continues to make media headlines, I've come face to face with the painful reality of supervising African American students in the age of #BlackLivesMatter.

## THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER MOVEMENT

#BlackLivesMatter is a recently developed social and political movement that is mainly identified as a medium for bringing attention to the murder of unarmed black people by police and vigilantes. However, the movement seeks to highlight how black people are left “powerless” and “deprived of our basic human rights and dignity.”<sup>1</sup> The #BlackLivesMatter movement speaks to how African Americans currently live in a climate of “state violence”:

- Black poverty and genocide is state violence;
- 2.8 million black people being locked in cages in this country is state violence;
- Black women bearing the burden of a relentless assault on black children and our families is state violence;
- Black queer and trans folks bear a unique burden from a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of them like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes them and profits off of them, and that is state violence;
- 500,000 black people in the United States are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows;
- Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war;
- Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze them into boxes of normality defined by white supremacy, and that is state violence.<sup>2</sup>

The #BlackLivesMatter movement took shape in 2012 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a European American male who unlawfully shot and killed a seventeen-year-old unarmed African American male, Trayvon Martin, who was simply walking home from a visit to a local convenience store after purchasing a can of Arizona iced tea and a bag of Skittles.

Since the Zimmerman/Martin case, hundreds of police brutality cases involving unarmed African American victims have surfaced. Such cases include those of Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Renisha McBride, and John Crawford III, among countless others. Although these cases are not new, the filming of these incidents with mobile phone cameras, along with the ability to post these videos on social media for the world to see, has made police brutality a hot topic in the United States today. Now, the #BlackLivesMatter movement is knocking on the door of clinical pastoral education. How do supervisors train African Amer-

ican students who demonstrate pastoral struggles in working with European Americans as a result of psychological trauma and physical violence that these African American students may have personally experienced at the hands of European Americans? I propose that supervisors implement a prophetic model of supervision.

#### A PROPHETIC MODEL OF CPE SUPERVISION

Models of CPE supervision are expanding. Judith Ragsdale highlights four basic CPE supervision theories:

- psychotherapy-based supervision models, which include what Frawley-O'Dea and Sarnat classify as the patient-centered model;
- the supervisee-centered model and the supervisory-matrix-centered model;
- models based on developmental theories and social-role philosophies; and
- integrative models, some of which highlight Bernard's discrimination model along with the systems approach.<sup>3</sup>

These theories have been and continue to be very useful in the field of supervision, but none of them take into consideration the role of the supervisor as a prophet. In Judeo-Christian literature a prophet is defined as a messenger of God, one who brings words of truth, justice, and/or warning to persons in power or to a nation in general. At the same time, prophets also speak words of restorative justice, healing, and encouragement to victims of oppression. In the Jewish Torah, the prophet Isaiah speaks this type of reassuring message to the children of Israel who find themselves victims of war with a foreign country:

*"The spirit of the Lord GOD IS UPON ME,  
because the LORD HAS ANOINTED ME;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD'S FAVOR,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—*

*to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the LORD, TO DISPLAY HIS GLORY.”* (Isaiah 61:1–3, NRSV)

The prophet Isaiah’s words were repeated in the Christian Bible’s New Testament by Jesus (Luke 4:18–19), whom some refer to as a “New Testament prophet.”

In an age of racial tension and disharmony in the United States, when white nationalists can march through Charlottesville’s University of Virginia wielding lit tiki torches and chanting “Blood and Soil,” attempting to intimidate and stir fear among people of color, I argue that CPE supervisors may be called to act as prophets in clinical pastoral education to bring words of truth, justice, and/or warning to students from powerful, elite backgrounds and, at the same time, to speak words of restorative justice, healing, and encouragement to students who find themselves victims of oppression.

I also believe that a unique dynamic exists among oppressed communities. There are instances when the oppressed in one environment may become the oppressors in another environment. Evidence of this was highlighted during the feminist movement when some white women eagerly fought against sexism and gender discriminations while at the same time engaging in racial discrimination against black women. The same theme was recognized in the civil rights movement when some heterosexual black men fought tirelessly against racism but, at the same time, found themselves being sexist towards black women or homophobic towards the LGBTQIA community. Thus, I believe the prophetic model of CPE may also call supervisors to challenge students who feel victimized by society and, at the same time, to hold them accountable for other forms of oppression that they may unknowingly project in different arenas.

I propose that this prophetic model of supervision occurs in four stages:

- Stage 1 = Hear and Listen: Create a safe space in the CPE learning environment to hear and listen to the stories of racial, gender, and economic oppression and homophobia raised by victimized students. It is important to note that supervising students of color, in particular African American students, must take into consideration a “holistic” educational approach in which current sociological issues from outside the hospital learning context must be brought into the CPE learning environment.<sup>4</sup> In the CPE group, ask students who are not victims of an “ism,” those who primarily

identify with the larger European American patriarchal and heterosexual norm, to actively listen without judgment.

- Stage 2 = Acknowledge and Empathize: Acknowledge that the named oppression currently exists and acknowledge the corresponding history of this oppression. Put yourself in the victimized students' shoes. Validate their feelings ("I understand why you may feel that way"). Remember your body language. Explain the dynamic and impact of the oppression to students who may find themselves disconnected from their peers' stories.
- Stage 3 = Reflection and Response: Empower all the students to reflect on ways in which they can contribute to current social justice work and diversity efforts. Empower all the students in the group to respond to injustice by actively working against oppression within the community of their congregation, temple, or mosque.
- Stage 4 = Affirmation: Speak and demonstrate affirmation to all the students for their invaluable commitment and work towards a just society.

This prophetic model of supervision offers three specific objectives. First, this model gives victimized students an opportunity to experience empathy from a peer group, which is especially significant if members of the peer group resemble members of the oppressive society. This transformative moment may also free victimized students from feelings of internalized shame or guilt because of experiencing oppression in the larger society. This moment becomes a sacred opportunity as the oppressed begin to experience a bit of psychological and emotional freedom.

Second, this prophetic model of supervision raises the peer group's level of engagement in society. Implementing this prophetic model holds students accountable for reflecting on and enacting resolutions to societal ills.

The third intended outcome of this prophetic model is to rebuild victimized students' trust in the learning process. Some African American students may enter CPE with a state of discontentment, feeling as if their existence or humanity has not been honored by particular persons, such as European Americans, in their past. I propose that CPE supervisors use this prophetic model with African American students who have experienced racial discrimination and oppression. Using this model in CPE will develop trust in the student-supervisor relationship as well as in peer and staff relationships. Also, using this model in CPE will lessen students' defensiveness and resistance to learning and help them become more open and vulner-

able. I used this prophetic model of supervision in my work with Leviticus Johnson.

#### SUPERVISING LEVITICUS JOHNSON UTILIZING A PROPHETIC MODEL OF SUPERVISION IN THE AGE OF #BLACKLIVESMATTER

By mid-unit, I had created space to hear and listen to Leviticus's stories of police brutality. During his written presentation time that week, I invited Leviticus to present a reflection paper on his unlawful encounters with the police. During individual supervision that week, I encouraged Leviticus to share more about these experiences. As Leviticus shared his stories, I enacted openness and resisted making judgements. My body language was always welcoming and hospitable. I modeled this behavior during group sessions to help the peer group respond similarly.

Next, when Leviticus shared his stories during group and individual supervision that week, I responded with empathy. Empathy elicits connection and trust. I validated Leviticus's feelings that he shared in the course of telling his story. I put myself in Leviticus's shoes. I responded to Leviticus's stories by saying: "I can understand why you might feel that way . . ." I also briefly shared my own personal experiences of victimization by law enforcement. I modeled empathy for the other members of the peer group as well. Thus, most of Leviticus's peers responded with empathy too. I continued to maintain and model welcoming and hospitable body language. Parallel to this process, Leviticus was able to better minister to patients and family members who were experiencing their own illness or the illness or death of a loved one as a form of divine injustice. Leviticus listened to patients' stories with empathy, creating connection and community along with building patients' trust.

The next week of the program, I also empathized with Leviticus by facilitating didactics on three major historical events that have negatively affected African Americans:

- African enslavement
- Jim Crow laws
- mass incarceration

Sharing information with the group about these historical events allowed Leviticus to feel understood and connected. Leviticus could jump in

during these didactics and add his own wisdom and insight, which made him feel like an expert who was “right” about something. Thus, he began to feel powerful. Also, highlighting these historical events increased awareness, compassion, and sensitivity among the European American peers in the group.

Next, I apologized to Leviticus for the negative experiences of police brutality that he had experienced. An apology is more than simply saying “I’m sorry.” An apology acknowledges that a violation or concern has occurred. Acknowledging a concern means taking notice or observation of it—not pretending it doesn’t exist. By apologizing to Leviticus, I acknowledged that his concerns have been identified (and are real) and heard.

A powerful encounter occurred for Leviticus when one of his European American peers in the group also apologized for Leviticus’s negative encounters with police. Leviticus began to cry. I invited Leviticus to process his tears. Leviticus responded by highlighting that because the peer was European American, Leviticus felt this apology was coming on behalf of all the European Americans who had wronged him in his past. Leviticus expressed that he was finally beginning to feel a sense of peace when a European American person acknowledged and took notice of his victimization. This interaction is an example of why I believe it’s important to create diversity in the peer group. I intentionally work hard to interview and accept students from various ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds in particular peer groups. Leviticus was able to experience a personal and social transformation in his perception of European Americans because of his experience with European American peers in his CPE program.

Next, I invited both Leviticus and the entire CPE peer group to reflect on and brainstorm responses to the larger social issue of police brutality. My supervisory theory asserts that CPE allows students to experience personal transformation that will then impact the larger society. My supervisory theory asserts that we encourage students to understand how their pastoral role can influence social justice and advocacy locally, nationally, and globally. Thus, CPE students’ personal transformation leads to social transformation. Inviting Leviticus and the entire CPE peer group to reflect on and brainstorm resolutions to larger social ills allowed Leviticus and the peer group to learn how their pastoral role can influence the greater society. Leviticus and the peer group devised methods for actively working with their



respective local political officials along with becoming involved in civic organizations and global mission projects.

It is important to note that some CPE students may not want to be involved in doing justice work outside the hospital context or in their future career path. In the case of Leviticus's peer group, one European American student was resistant to engaging in social justice work. I was sensitive to this student's desire and respectful of her position. I handled this situation with empathy towards this student as well. I invited the student to reflect on a sociological issue that stirs her passion. This particular student expressed passion around animal rights. I invited her to think about methods she could engage in around justice in this area. I assert that all persons are passionate about at least one justice issue. I encourage the supervisor to invite students to reflect on any particular issue that calls their attention; thus, that issue becomes that student's point of reference to reflect further on.

Last but not least, I thanked Leviticus for sharing his story. I also affirmed and empowered Leviticus's pastoral gifts, skills, and talents. I thanked the peer group for coming alongside Leviticus with empathy, acknowledgment, and resolutions, and I affirmed and empowered each of the group members' gifts, skills, and talents. It is important to note that I limit outside sociological experiences to the first half of the unit. If outside sociological experiences extend past the middle of the unit, then students' learning may be stifled in that students may not be open to reflecting on their own individual pastoral growing edges, opting instead to remain defensive and closed and to blame the wider society for their inability to move forward and become better.

#### TRANSFORMING TRAUMA TO TRUST—

#### A PROPHETIC MODEL OF SUPERVISION IN THE AGE OF #BLACKLIVESMATTER

This prophetic model of supervision is unlike any of the other four pastoral supervisory models mentioned earlier in this article. This prophetic model of supervision challenges supervisors to think about supervisory education that has an impact beyond the four walls of a hospital or other clinical setting. In the Isaiah 61 passage quoted earlier, the prophet Isaiah invites the Israelites to look forward to living a life of trust and community, free from mental and physical bondage and trusting that the divine master would right the wrongs done against them by their oppressors and would

grant restoration. The Isaiah passages challenges readers today to transform trauma to trust in the midst of oppression, understanding that freedom is a state of mind first and foremost. Then, freed minds have a responsibility to work towards freed bodies and freed economic conditions. Freed people have an obligation to ensure that other oppressed persons can also experience the opportunity to transform trauma to trust.

Not only can victims of oppression transform trauma to trust but CPE students who have been oppressed can live free and also “learn free” by resisting defensiveness, evasiveness, and disconnection in the learning process. CPE students can learn free by experiencing freedom from internalized shame and guilt in the learning process. Under this prophetic model of supervision, Leviticus continued through his CPE experience with openness to learning and openness to gaining trusting relationships with his European American CPE peers, staff chaplains, and medical staff. By addressing Leviticus’s social condition related to police brutality at the middle of the unit, I could then shift the focus during the rest of the unit so Leviticus could reflect on other more pressing pastoral growing edges such as his perfectionism and caretaking tendencies. I was glad that at least one European American peer was able to come alongside Leviticus with empathy and offer an apology. This experience would have been more difficult to supervise if this had not occurred, but I believe that my modeling empathy and an apology as the supervisor enabled the European American peer to shadow my actions. While I used this model with a particular student who had experienced oppression, I believe this model can be utilized with any challenging student. In our current climate, I believe that everyone yearns for and could benefit from transforming trauma to trust, living free, and learning free.

## NOTES

- 1 "About the Black Lives Matter Network," *Black Lives Matter*, accessed October 15, 2016, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>.
- 2 "About the Black Lives Matter Network."
- 3 Judith R. Ragsdale, "Educating Clinical Pastoral Education Supervisors: A Grounded Theory Study of Supervisory Wisdom" (PhD dissertation, Antioch University, 2009), 137, <http://aura.antioch.edu/etds/137>.
- 4 Sharif El-Mekki, "9 Things Every Educator Should Know When Teaching Black Students," *Education Post*, accessed April 14, 2017, <http://educationpost.org/9-things-every-educator-should-know-when-teaching-black-students/>.