

## **38th Street & Chicago Avenue: The Intersection of Healing and Hope**

**by Dominic J. Ledesma**

Watching footage of George Floyd's murder hit close to home for me, literally and figuratively. While I grew up in the East Metro Area of the Twin Cities, I was familiar the exact intersection where his life was taken on May 25, 2020. I worked for the Minneapolis Public Schools from 2008-2010. One of my sites was a middle school located on the south side, about five minutes east of 38th & Chicago.

The weekend of July 4th was the first time I had been back home in nearly a year and half. Making time to visit George Floyd Square was also planned as a part of this trip. After following all the coverage of community responses to Floyd's murder worldwide, it was hard to know what it would feel like to visit 38th & Chicago. One thing I knew was that it was not going to be easy. To me, the loss of George Floyd was the loss of an uncle, father, brother, son, co-worker, neighbor, fellow human being, and community member. I didn't know George Floyd, but then again, I did.

A half-block radius surrounding the intersection was closed except for foot and bike traffic. The memorial expanded out to all four corners of the intersection. It included pop-up art installations, a world map with pushpins for visitors, and benches and raised flower beds that were built by the community for the site. It appeared as if there was coordination among a group of volunteers to organize and maintain the space. Like us, most visitors to the area were there to pay their respects, to grieve, to reflect, and to honor Floyd's memory.

It was extremely challenging to approach the very site where Floyd's neck was fatally pressed against the pavement for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Each step closer was accompanied by an increasing amount of heaviness and contemplation. The only thing I liken it to, perhaps unsurprisingly, is the feeling I've had during visitation services for a loved one; the reality of encountering my own grief and the unalterable feeling of knowing that person has transitioned into their next journey. The number of ofrendas and mementos placed on site was overwhelming. There were so many items that a cordoned walkway was set up so that visitors could walk through and around the space where Floyd took his last breaths. There were pictures and drawings of Floyd, flowers, poems, candles, burned smudge bundles, scripture verses, tobacco offerings, and even stuffed animals, toys, and colorings left by young children. There was an opening line from one particular poem that sticks with me, "Grief is really love we want to give but cannot."

I would encourage anyone to visit this space if you have the chance. The city of Minneapolis has since designated the intersection as a sacred space for racial healing. What is more, they are working with Floyd's family and community members to develop a more permanent vision for George Floyd Square. The ever-expanding opportunities for ongoing healing and community engagement in this space are, in my view, a constructive way to acknowledge the consequences of Floyd's tragic murder, and to do so with humility, humanity, respect, and reconciliation. From a personal and professional point of view, 38th & Chicago serves as a difficult and necessary reminder that we still have work to do as a society. It is my hope that we better recognize our

individual and collective responsibility as a society to know better, do better, and know how to do better.