

WEBINAR SERIES

# MENTAL HEALTH *and* CARE

COPING WITH STRESS DURING THIS SEASON AND BEYOND

presented by  AMPLIFY MEDIA

## Episode 4 – Pandemic as Moral Injury: How Do We React to Global Suffering?

Watch this episode on demand [here](#).

Find out more about Amplify Media [here](#).

### Host

Rev. Justin Coleman, Senior Pastor, University United Methodist Church, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

### Panelists

- Sophia Agtarap, Director of Communications, Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee
- Rev. Dr. Brad E. Kelle, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, California
- Pádraig Ó Tuama, Poet and Theologian, Ireland

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If you are suffering from mental health concerns, contact your doctor or other health professional.

These hotlines are also available:

The National Alliance on Mental Health Helpline → (800) 950-6264

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline → (800) 273-8255

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline → (800) 662-4357

National Domestic Violence Hotline → (800) 799-7233

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### Episode Recap

Moral injury is related to other stressors and burnout in complicated ways, but typically when you're discussing moral injury, it's because there's a feeling of a lost virtue, and it presents as a feeling similar to despair. While moral injury can have long-term, damaging effects, there is also something "moral" about moral injury because it is an invitation to broaden your perspective and view others with respect.

This year's physical distancing contributes to our moral stress, because the network of friends, family, and spiritual advisors you might normally connect with about these struggles aren't available in the same ways, making it easier to disconnect from others.

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### **Episode Recap**

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The panelists encouraged pastors serving people suffering with moral injury to be honest – name the realities of this year and their moral emotions – and encourage your church staff to do the same. Give honest expression to what people are suffering and respond with compassion. Pastors should create a library of resources they feel confident giving people suffering with moral injury. (Such as biblical literature and poetry of lament, other poetry and art, etc. Brad Kelle recommended *The Body Keeps the Score*.) Resiliency comes through honesty. What have we been missing prior to this moment that helped lead to this moment of injustices?

Pastors should examine the "professionalism" of their organizations and consider what pastoring might have been missed because we were pursuing attendance and budget numbers. This moment is an invitation to more one-on-one pastoral engagement. Remember to "do less with less" this year. It's time to imagine different ways to perform congregational and pastoral care.

For individuals experiencing moral injury, seek help from friends, family, your church, and helplines. Those people are trained to listen just to experiences like this. Remember that your story now doesn't have to be your final story.

Create rituals – individual and communal, when possible – that work for you and help you heal. Practicing small "acts of repair" are ways to testify that good can still occur. Name those sufferings and recognize they're real. Try on different practices, and find what works for you and is life-giving. Sophia Agtarap advised examining your media intake and your media production.

Community has been shown to help with moral injury, so pastors should continue to find and practice new ways for people to connect during this time.

To be better allies, pastors should pay more attention to conversations around race and inequity led by activists. Biblical literature pays attention to Empire and power. Study post-colonial theology. We can't do ministry well if we do not understand the culture around us.

There is a "suspicion of hope" – as Pádraig Ó Tuama described it – that's happening now, and we need to guard against it. Hope is what animates us.