



### **Seasoned NBA Chaplain to Facilitate BCI Loop**

When Columbus T. Smith Jr. works with a group of professional basketball players, he's keenly aware of just how hard it can be to keep the attention of *any* active, distracted-but-seeking young man. But as a chaplain for the Minnesota Timberwolves for 13 seasons, a volunteer chapel service provider at the Hennepin County Adult Corrections Facility for 25 years, and a volunteer tutor and mentor to “at risk” students, Smith enjoys the unique and varied challenges of his calling.

He now adds another role, as the Fraternity Facilitator and Chaplain for BCI Loop – the fraternity for and driven by pro basketball players.

Working with athletes fits into Smith's interest in working with young men, especially African American. He began as Chaplain with Minnesota's NBA team after making an informal inquiry to its front office. The timing and alignment of interests couldn't have been better for Smith. Now starting his 14<sup>th</sup> season with the team, he continues to thank God for His divine acts. He's excited to work with BCI. “I love the focus of promoting and strengthening the player's walk with God,” he says. “And because of the visibility that players have, this will give future generations role models to look up to that are a positive influence and have spiritual and natural wealth.”

Raised by parents who provided “Godly examples of discipline, longevity, and success,” Smith knows the importance of strong early heroes. “They've been married for more than 65 years, they are still healthy for their age – Dad is 92, Mom is 89. They taught me and my siblings the importance of a godly lifestyle, education, and working hard through precept and example. As African Americans, they warned us of the challenges of prejudices that we could potentially face, as well as how to trust God for resolution.” Like his parents, he's built a strong marriage – now going on 31 years – based on embracing differences and relying on each other's strengths. He says, “I've been known to say that she gives me the opportunity to fail.” He accepted his formal call to ministry in 1995 after a decade of volunteering with a pastor. He was ordained by the Bishop of his church, Church of God in Christ, in 1999.

Columbus Smith stepped outside of his parents' strict Pentecostal roots when he joined a basketball team in eighth grade. His interest in basketball grew even more when, in a conversation with another team chaplain, he learned that the sport's roots are in popular Christian culture. Invented by an instructor named Dr. James Naismith at the Springfield, Mass. YMCA (now Springfield College) in 1891, the original game used peach baskets and soccer balls, with rules loosely based on a children's game called "Duck on a Rock." Its purpose was to keep young men physically active, spiritually engaged in the YMCA curriculum and out of trouble during long winters in New England.

He says that BCI can help support the sport's return to faith, integrity, and values. "Because the players' lives are of such high profile," Smith says, "getting more players involved with the original intent of the basketball mission will I believe, cause a more public awareness of it."

Smith says that working with pro basketball players, with limited time available, "provides a challenge for delivering a message that will hold and captivate their attention while, at the same time, giving them something to remember. I try to supply them with memory joggers so that they will have something to refer back to and help them remember some of the bullet items of the message."

"Their spiritual journey, and actually their lives, are very public and open – which can be challenging in and of itself," he says. "Their positions are glamourized and they are looked up to whether they like it or not. They always have to be aware that anything they say or do can be scrutinized by the media or general public at large. Their position, visibility, and perceived wealth cause them to be exposed to people, places, and things that 'ordinary' individuals would not have to face."

BCI is thrilled to welcome Columbus Smith to its leadership team.

*As an ordained minister, Columbus T. Smith Jr. has been a chaplain for the Minnesota Timberwolves for 13 seasons and he has volunteered for Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facilities for more than 25 years providing chapel services for inmates. He has worked in the computer science field for the past twenty years as an Analyst. In schools, Columbus volunteers as a tutor and mentor to "at risk" students. Columbus is Financial Secretary for the Minnesota Jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ, and he also serves as an ordained minister in his local church where he works with church finances, as a counselor, tutor, and Bible teacher.*

*Columbus has a degree in Economics from the University of Minnesota and a Masters in Community Ministry Leadership from Bethel University. Columbus is married and has three children and four grandchildren.*

