

Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

Trading Spaces

Mary's Perspective:

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house." Mark 6:4

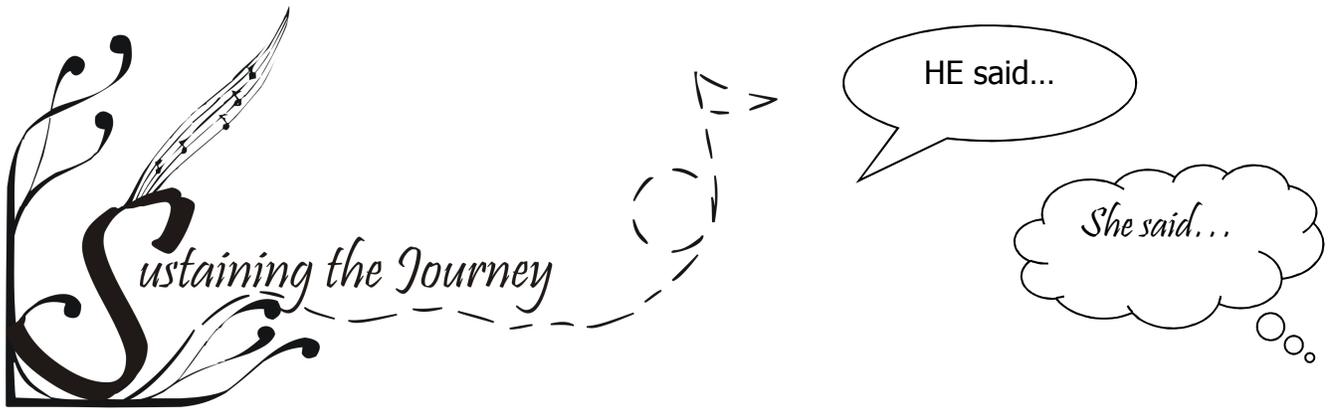
Sometimes, it's fun to put that to the test! Recently, Bob and I had the opportunity to trade places. Bob lives just a few minutes away from his home parish, where I serve as Director of Liturgy and Music. Bob is Director of Liturgy and Music in a parish minutes from where I grew up, closer to my home than his. With significant snow forecast, and with the blessing of both of our pastors, we decided it would be smart to trade churches for the weekend. Reflecting on this experience, I've made a number of observations.

First, it is awesome to be able to see how things work in other churches. Sometimes we get so mired in how we do things that we can forget there are others out there who may have a different approach, face different challenges, or do things that we would do well to learn from. When was the last time you attended Mass at a different parish? Did it make you appreciate what you have? Did you notice when folks did things differently than you are used to? When opportunities arise, I strongly suggest you experience other worship styles. See what other choirs are singing. Observe how the ministers move about in a different space. Appreciate the preaching of a different priest. It's enriching!

Second, as is often the case, I was struck by how alike we are. Truly, our ritual is universal. Certainly, there are nuances that are different, but overall the pattern, ritual, words of the prayers, etc. offer familiarity even in an unfamiliar setting. The deacon at Bob's church has this thick Texas drawl, but he still proclaimed the Universal Prayer and the words of dismissal. As my children would say, same-same.

Another observation is that we tend to get comfortable in "our" space, and it's good to move out of your comfort zone occasionally. I was a little more on my toes, paying attention to details, and making sure to communicate effectively with the other ministers - things I risk taking for granted in my regular space. I wanted to make sure I did a good job, so that Bob didn't regret the trade and his pastor would be open to it again, should the opportunity arise. It made me smile when one of Bob's ensemble members said, "hey - that's just like how Bob does it!"

I think it's good for the parishes to experience different leadership. Just as we get used to how we always do things, it's good for an assembly to recognize there are other approaches to music and ministry. It gives them a chance to appreciate what they have, or to recognize that there's better out there - and perhaps raise the level of their own participation or ministry.



The trade made me look with fresh eyes at how Bob and I do things. For example, I usually check to make sure the master sound system is turned on - but forgot to mention that to him. There are a number of pieces of music that we have adapted to our own style. I sing this part here, or he begins with that part of the refrain there. Not that I want to justify the artistic choices I have made, but having someone sub for you presents an opportunity to evaluate the merit of those artistic choices and if they are worth perpetuating. The pattern was also different - for example, I pray with our liturgical ministers five minutes before Mass. It was odd to have that extra time before Mass started - and made me appreciate that time to center and focus.

I also think trading spaces is a true exercise in trust. Bob trusted me to treat his music ministers with utmost respect and dignity, to lead his assembly well, and overall to not embarrass him. I trusted Bob to greet our assembly in a warm and welcoming manner, to work with our cantors and choir, and to not scheme with my pastor about me behind my back. ... and I think he only told one assembly that he was actually me, just without makeup! All kidding aside, part of what made the trade easy was the fact that Bob is a first-class liturgical musician who is a true professional. I would do it again in a heartbeat.

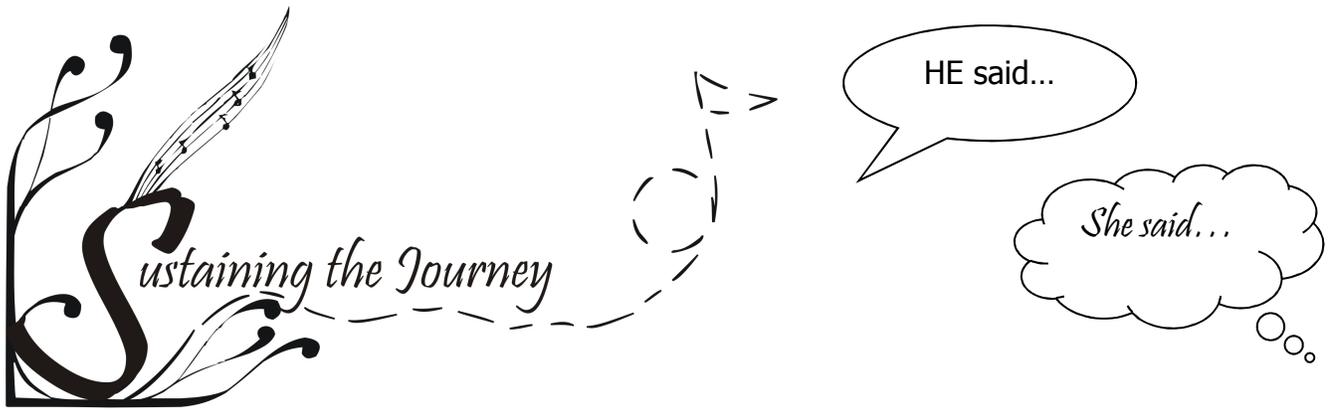
Finally, back to the quote... sometimes we can hear the same message over and over, but when a fresh voice proclaims it, somehow the words ring more true. I can talk to my choir about breathing and posture, but when Bob addresses those topics, they suddenly sit straighter and breathe from the diaphragm. Hopefully, the same is true of the assembly's experience of the music at worship. Even though we sang some of the same songs, perhaps the different voice opened the possibility for the Spirit to come through.

In our last blog, Bob reflected on his role in showing others the way. I must say, our trade made me truly appreciate how well he has helped formed those around him - myself included. And as fun as it was...there's no place like home!

Bob's Perspective:

In many ways, my experience of our recent episode of "Trading Spaces" was much the same as that of Mary - but I look at it from a different point of view. As Mary mentioned, the parish at which she ministers is my home parish. In addition, I served there as Director of Music and Liturgy (and for a while as Business Manager) for fourteen years - and before that as a substitute musician and assistant director for more years than I'll admit. For a time, my now dear departed wife served there on the Pastoral Council and in Music Ministry. My Mom and Dad (both deceased) belonged to the parish and attended faithfully. It was very much a place that fostered a good part of our social life as well as our spiritual wellbeing. I still have a number of family members and friends who attend there. Every time I go back to Mary's parish, I'm filled with nostalgia and memories (both good and not so good). I feel the warmth and comfort of being in a place I love, and the realization that life moves on whether or not we wish it to do so.

I've been at my current church of ministry now for almost twenty years. As much as I love my home parish, I deeply cherish the community in which I now minister. It is very rare in life to "hit the jackpot" twice. God has truly and abundantly blessed me. I can say that with ease as I reflect on both parishes.



I have changed and modified my modus operandi considerably from my time there. However, in a Pavlovian sort of way, I was almost drawn into the ways of yesteryear. I found myself asking members of the Music Ministry questions such as, “how does Mary intro this piece,” or “how does Mary do this or that” as I pulled at my own reigns tightly so as not to fall into habits of the past.

In a number of respects, the parish is not the same as when I left there, and that’s a good thing. I enjoy seeing how things have evolved and blossomed – much due to the talent and leadership of Mary. I have to admit that I’m not as comfortable there as I was back then. That’s a good thing too. It helps me to realize that we all need to move on at some point in our lives. We all need to blossom and evolve into the best that God calls us to be. And in order to do so, we sometimes need to step out of our comfort zone to explore all that life holds for us. Sometimes that means leaving (at least temporarily) something we cherish – many times in order to find more to cherish along our journey.