

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.

A Difference of Generations

Mary's Perspective

Part of the reason we created this blog is because, although we have very similar roles in different parishes and often agree on *what* we do, we definitely have different approaches on *how* we do what we do. Our usual 6am Sunday conversation recently revealed yet another difference that, in this case, we attribute more to generation than to gender. (Remember, Yoda and Bob are contemporaries...)

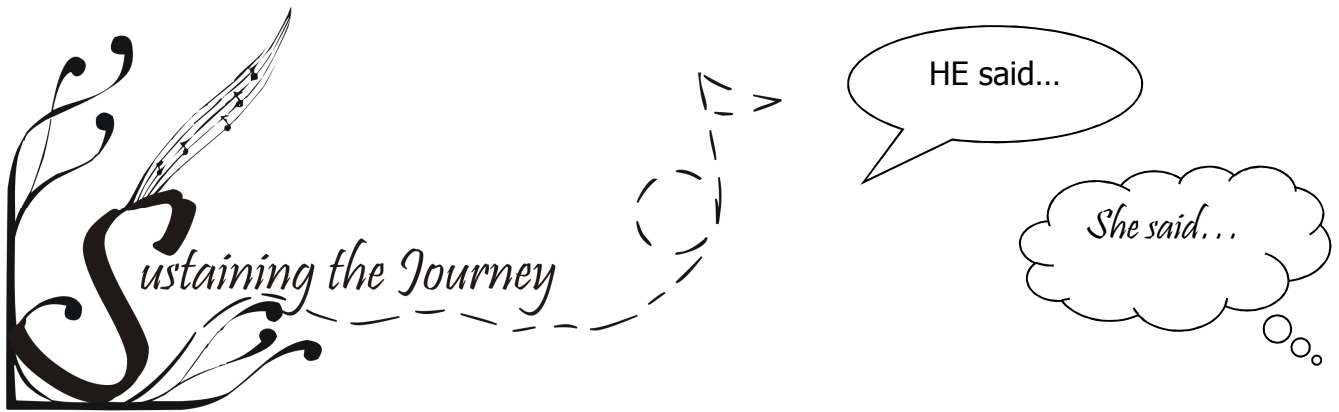
Over this summer, I have been presented the “opportunity” to move into a different office. (Read: I’ve been evicted. The church needs to repurpose the space I have occupied for the past ten years. I am dragging my feet on the whole process. I LIKE my space and I don’t like feeling disrupted. *WHINE!*) Although my new office is twice the size of the current one, I have determined to purge as much as possible rather than move items I don’t need. In some ways, this is a daunting task – in others, it’s very freeing. I suspect I will be much more content when I have less baggage weighing me down mentally.

So, first I must be honest. I might be considered a packrat. Case in point: Anytime I attend a convention or workshop or publisher event, I evaluate new music with a letter grade system. (Think A, B, C, ICK, etc.) In general, music rated B+ or higher may get incorporated into our repertoire, depending on needs. In my latest organizing session, I discovered a pile of music labeled “B or lower, from NPM Convention 2010”. Yes, I took the time to label it – yet still hung onto it... for nine years... My recycle bin is quite full now!

I also discovered back issues (I won’t mention how old) of magazines from our various professional associations. This spurred the above-referenced conversation. Do we hang onto old publications with the intent of looking back at articles for inspiration, reference, or teaching material? In Bob’s case, the answer is yes. He has a librarian who meticulously reviews these magazines, selects articles, references and cross-references them, files the physical copies, and maintains a searchable electronic database of them. I plop them on the shelf with the intent of getting to that “some day”. Now, ten years later, I suppose “some day” has come.

The reality of my generation is that I am much more likely to search online for articles, inspiration, education, and even new musical repertoire. For me, the days of print media are quickly coming to an end. Books and magazines have their place, but the search capabilities of digital media and even the convenience of podcasts and audio books have proven more valuable in our time-crunched, environmentally-conscious society. I haven’t quite made the jump to playing the piano with an i-pad of music, but many of my colleagues have.

We also discussed how we save some of our preparation materials. For example, Bob supports a weekly school mass. To assist the student lectors, he types up the readings for them to take home and practice. He keeps master packets of sheet music to facilitate rehearsing the music ministry. I have all the handwritten notes I studiously took at workshops and conventions for the past dozen years. What is useful and time-saving? How much is too much?



There are multiple sides to this issue. On the one hand, the mere act of perusing paper articles, or typing up readings or notes forces us to digest the material – and hopefully grow from that. Even organizing and filing such articles helps me learn more about the topics. Additionally, having a library of information leaves a legacy and a great start to the next person who will serve in our roles once we move on. There is value to that. On the other hand, how much stuff is just... well, stuff? Do I really need to hang on to old magazines and music octavos I may never use? Am I more likely to seek resources digitally? Or am I being wasteful of hard-earned resources by pitching them?

Whenever I write a blog, I certainly am geared toward the professional liturgical minister – but I want to provide context that is relevant to anyone in any industry. This is one of those topics that has some universal application. Whether you are an accountant or teacher or plumber, how many of your records and professional publications are worth storing in print format? Do you keep your college textbooks thinking you'll refer back to them? (For the record, I suspect I have a few of those stashed in the basement, too... nearly thirty years later...)

Do you fall in the generational lines like Bob and me?

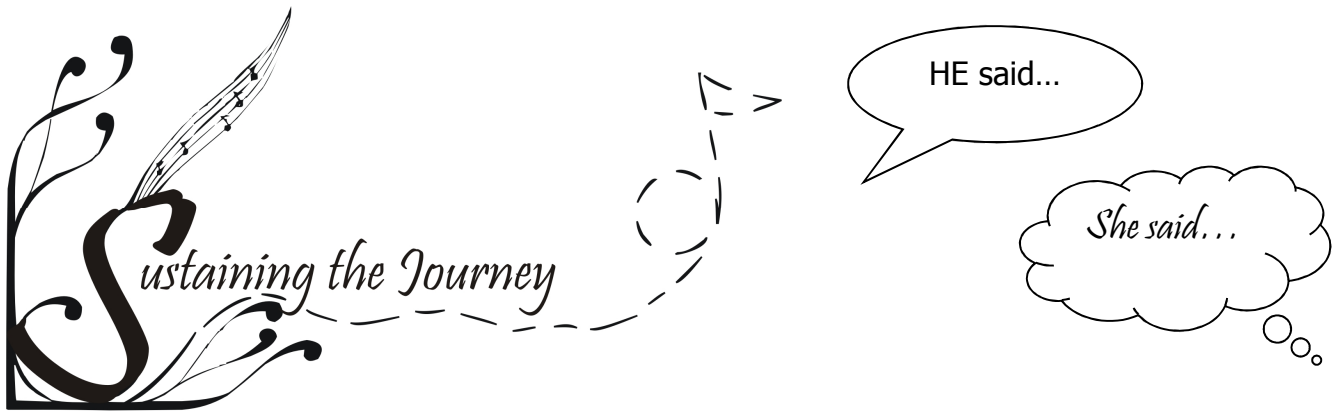
Perhaps my office move really is an opportunity I should embrace. Summer is a great time to clear out some of the clutter, both physical and mental. Pick a thunderstormy day and target a shelf, a drawer, a file cabinet, or whatever makes sense. Consider the usefulness, the environment, and the legacy factor. How much is too much? Perhaps you'll find some treasures. Perhaps you'll be inspired. Perhaps you'll feel freedom. If nothing else, you may get a good laugh at what you saved – or a few head-clearing sneezes from the dust you kick up.

Bob's Perspective

If one were to journey (safari would probably be a better descriptor) through the threshold of my office door, they would easily state that, compared to me, Mary is a packmouse at best. I not only have most of the stuff that I've collected during the time I've spent at my current parish (nearly 20 years), but also most of what I had at my former parish (14+ years). But, believe it or not, I just about know where everything is and can lay my hands on anything I need in particular within a few minutes.

You might ask, "why?" The answer is simple: because you just never know what you might need. My Dad (God rest his soul) used to say that if you read well, write well, speak well and know basic math, there's nothing you can't accomplish. In my experience, he was absolutely correct. I don't have an i-pad (except to run the Church sound system); I still have a flip phone (recently updated). I've never owned an X-box or Gameboy. The closest I ever came was renting an Atari system from a video store a few times to try my hand at Pong (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pong>), so I could "kick butt" at the local arcade. (Yes, Mary, I even beat Yoda once – or at least that's my story and I'm sticking to it.) But I digress.

I have nothing against technology, and manage my way quite well with computers and such. However, I tend to stay old school, because that keeps me grounded in the basics. I think back to Thursday, August 14, 2003. On that day, there occurred a power outage that affected a wide portion of our Northeast and Midwest, as well as Ontario Canada. It lasted in most places for a couple days. Think about it: no air-conditioners, no microwave ovens, no televisions, radios, stereos, lights or hairdryers – and no computers! In addition, many of the cell towers and repeaters were out, so cell phone use was very sporadic at best. For the most part, the lives of inhabitants of that region were paralyzed.



So what if the internet or electricity went down again? (It's more possible than you might imagine.) How would that affect our lives? Without computers, how adept are we at researching information, for example, utilizing a card catalog? If all of our resources are electronic (no hardcopies), how would we procure information when we need it? Without calculators or computers to do all of our cyphering how could we function with simple things like balancing our checking accounts without knowing simple math? Without word processors, how else can we communicate without writing in longhand? As musicians without music writing programs, how would we be able to compose or arrange music without notation?

Our Church organ recently became in need of repair. (This anecdote is what actually spurred our Sunday morning conversation regarding this topic.) It's an electronic instrument. The exact part we need will be tough to find because the company that manufactured the instrument is no longer in business. Without this part, this would seemingly make the organ permanently unusable. The technician who is helping me is another 'old school' student. He told me that if he's not able to locate the exact part, he knows a few tricks of the trade that just may work. I asked him what he had in mind. He said that he ran into this same particular problem a number of years ago. It took him some time to figure out, but he was able to make the repair and save an expensive instrument from extinction. He went on to say that most people will tell you that these parts can't be adapted or modified to work again, but if you know a little about basic electronics and have some skill with a soldering iron, you'd be surprised what might happen. I smiled and told him that I wouldn't be a bit surprised. We both knowingly laughed.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to disparage modern technology or those who use it. Truth be told, I take advantage of modern conveniences all the time. One would be foolish to disavow modern marvels and what they can do to make our lives better and more efficient. However, what I'm saying is that while of all this is well and good, it doesn't hurt (and may even be advantageous) to remember and practice the basics every now and then.