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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.

### **Making a Difference**

#### *Mary's Perspective:*

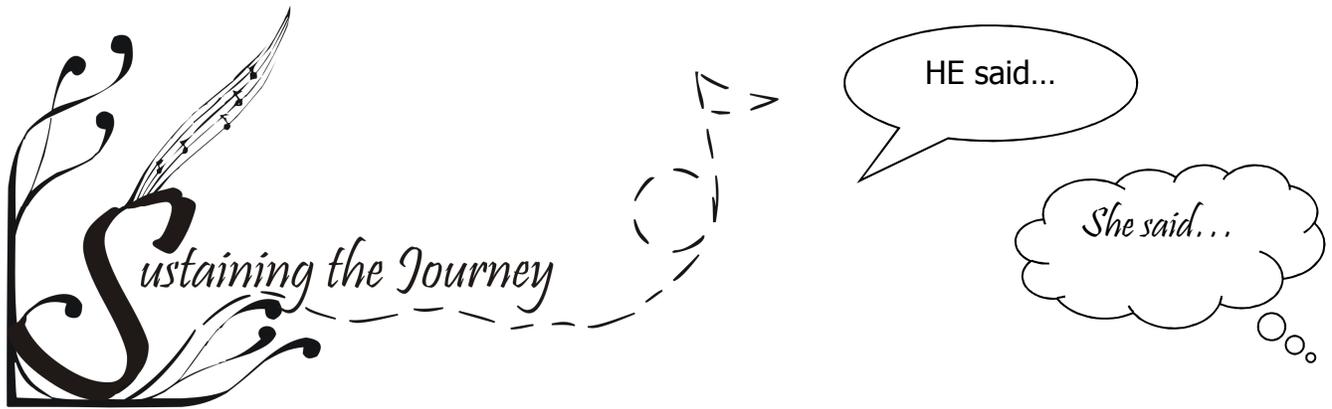
A priest friend and I were reflecting recently about the unique perspective that church ministers are afforded. In our careers, we are both blessed and challenged to meet a wide range of people. There are folks that come to the church because they are broken, hurt, and searching. And there are people that gravitate to the church because they have an inner core based on service.

It's easy to get frustrated by all the brokenness. Sin is inherent in humanity. Hopefully, in some way, our ministry offers consolation to the hurting, guidance to those who stray, and a welcome to the lost. But I've been reflecting a lot on the other group of folks – the ones who come because they want to make life better for others. These are the people who live the commandments, who don't necessarily preach the Gospel with words because they show it with their lives. Let me share some examples...

I have the privilege of serving in a community that grew during the baby-boom era. Many of our parishioners are still in their little bungalow "starter homes" – the kind of house that has two or three bedrooms, one bathroom, and where parents raised five or six children. I regularly spend time with couples that have been married 40 or 50 or even 60 years.

Ed is one of these people. Sure, the house was loud and chaotic, and there was always a line for the bathroom. But Ed's kids knew they were loved. Ed ran a print shop and was the go-to dad for the schools. Scout master, coach, fundraiser – Ed would roll up his sleeves and make life better for those around him. I distinctly remember Ed coming to me once for some advice. His daughter had suffered a miscarriage, and he desperately wanted to help her in some way to find peace. He sought a female perspective, hoping to glean insight into how he could help with the recovery process. Ed was a kind and gentle soul who took care of the neighbors' drive when snow-blowing, who used his business to help the church with print needs at a very discounted price, and who organized some 200 volunteers for the annual church festival.

Nick is another one of these people. Nick was born and raised in a blue-collar town in PA, and moved to Ohio to seek a better life for his wife and subsequent children. Nick worked hard outside of the home while his wife kept the busy household running smoothly. They were a team. In his "retirement", Nick was even busier. He faithfully served the volunteer fire department, fed literally thousands of families through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and worked as volunteer church sacristan, unlocking the building a 5am every day and preparing the church for daily mass. He recognized what needed to be done, and did it without being asked – from setting out the vessels to opening up the piano and bringing out the music supplies for a funeral.



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Mary is another one of these people. Mary had a smile that lit up the room, and a twinkle that made her eyes dance. Mary was an Irish spitfire, small of stature but with a huge personality. She was mom, friend, and companion to many. She crocheted blankets for the prayer shawl ministry, faithfully sang with the funeral choir, offered compassion to the hurting as a Stephen Minister, and participated weekly in bible studies and faith formation experiences. Even at 86, Mary was committed to growing in her faith. Mary attended daily mass and prayed the rosary and cross-stitched beautiful items that she gave away lavishly.

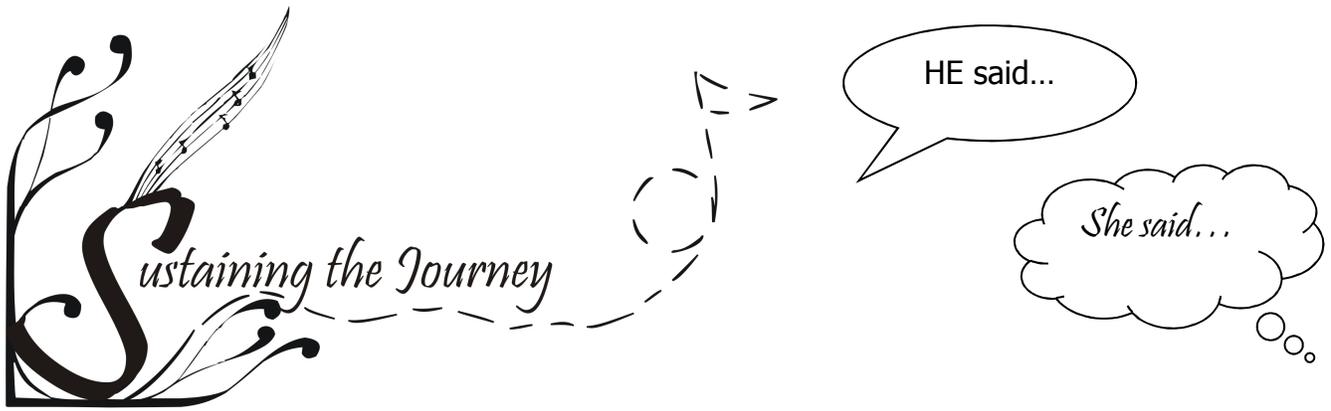
In ministry, we get to meet folks like Ed and Nick and Mary, and walk at least some part of the journey with them. I have been blessed to laugh and cry with them, and I have learned much about values and kindness, and making a difference in others' lives.

Bob and I recently wrote a magazine article that addressed gender differences in ministry. One of our observations is that men tend to be more dispassionate, and women form lasting bonds. In our respective ministries, sometimes I think Bob is more disconnected from the people – both physically and mentally. That's not to say he's some kind of ogre (not at all), but there are definitely differences in our approaches – hence, why *Sustaining the Journey* was born and why this blog is "He Said-She Said"! At Bob's church, the music ministry area is more segregated from the primary congregational area. (I call it the Play Pen.) At my parish, the music is smack in the center of everything, and I can make eye contact with everyone who is gathered for prayer.

Bob is a pretty task-oriented kind of guy. He gets the job done and moves on to the next task. I find that much of my ministry has to do with the folks that stop by my office asking, "have you got a minute?". For me, the relationships have a lot of impact, bringing much joy and frustration – often simultaneously.

Back to my examples of Ed, Nick, and Mary... these three quality human beings are examples of the many beautiful people I have been blessed to minister with. We have walked the road together. And I have played each of their funerals. The separation of death is painful, and the gap they leave in the life of the church is palpable. Yes, our faith reassures us that this is not the end. Yes, I am happy for them – they're good. I'm confident of that. It just stinks to be the ones left behind. There are days that I enter worship with an ache in my heart.

It's these days that I need to remind myself that my life is richer because of having known them. And I am reminded that my ministry can make a difference. Perhaps there's a lesson in this for all of us. Who do you have incidental contact or lasting friendship with, as a result of your ministry? How have they impacted your life? How can you take what you've learned from their example, and spread it? Maybe it's a random act of kindness, like calling someone to tell them they did a good job today (Mary often used to leave me encouraging voice messages filled with gratitude). Perhaps it's helping a neighbor (like Ed with his snow-blower), or showing up when others would rather still be in their jammies (Nick). Maybe it prods us to truly treasure our spouse, or to find ways of making each of our kids recognize how special they are, even if they have to share a bedroom or bathroom.



Now I know that not everyone is a professional, paid Church minister. But I propose that, whether you are part of the choir, or pack sandwiches for the homeless once a month, or simply show up occasionally, you also have the potential of walking the road with some of the finest Christians you'll ever meet. Forming close relationships opens the possibility of deeper pain when separation occurs – but it also opens the door to a wealth of blessings. As a minister, I am entrusted with helping others in their faith relationship. I truly believe my own faith, value structure, parenting style, and many of my life choices have been formed because of the influence of Ed, Nick, Mary, and a host of other wonderful people. Perhaps this was a lot of rambling – but it boils down to two questions:

How has your life been changed by those with whom you share the journey?

How will you make a difference in others' lives?

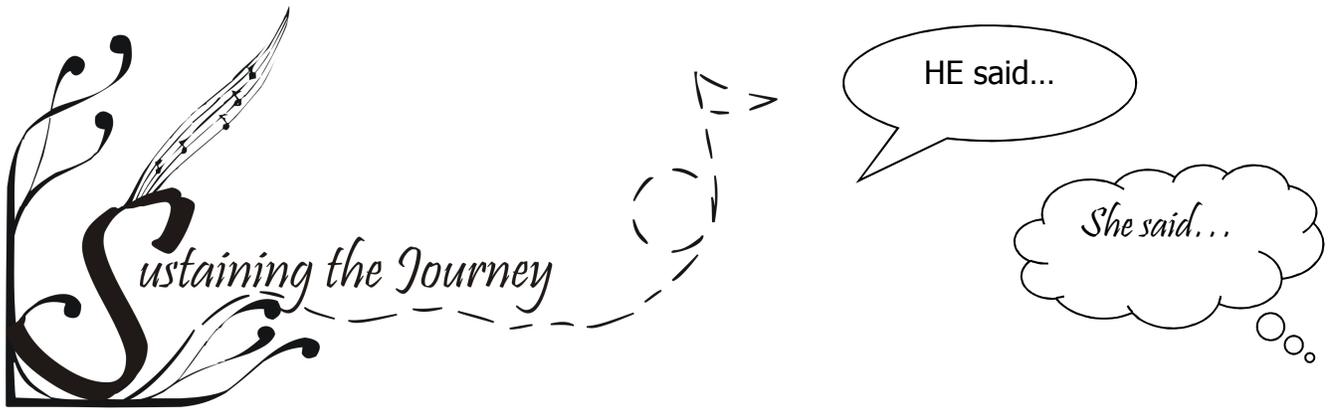
*Bob's Perspective:*

I wouldn't go so far as to say that I'm disconnected from our Assembly. It is true that our music area is not as integrated with community seating as Mary's, and my office doesn't have instant public access. However, I view my role as teaching others to minister well. I won't always be at this parish, but many of them will, so it's essential for them to learn how to care for and minister to each other. My role is to feed, educate and nurture them (the ministers). That's how they learn (or continue to grow) in order make a difference. As the old saying goes, "If you give a person a fish, they'll eat today; if you teach a person to fish, they'll eat every day." They also need to understand the different characteristics of apathy (not caring), empathy (healthy caring) and sympathy (unhealthy caring) – empathy, of course being the goal (but that's for another blog).

I knew a couple of the people to whom Mary is referring (she works at my home parish, as I did many moons ago)– and there are a number of people who would fit that same bill – both at her parish and mine as well. It has been incredible throughout my ministerial life to have known and ministered to (and with) so many fine people – and that continues today. Many of them made a difference in my life (and I hope I did the same for them). Mary and I are both very blessed.

Recently, the members of the Music Ministry that I serve lost one of our members to a rare form of cancer. She was diagnosed the end of October and died in the first weeks of January (very similar in some respects to my own wife's journey). While our choir member's death is definitely a loss to all of us, some of our members were hit rather hard – including myself.

This was, however, a great opportunity for education. Through this experience, some of them learned that sometimes we need to put our own feelings (emotions or whatever) aside in order to minister to others whose needs are greater – in this case, the family members of our deceased friend. We (the Music Ministry) struggled together throughout her process of acceptance, suffering and death. Sometimes I was looked upon as being hard and dispassionate, when in fact I was being empathetic. As it turned out, the empathy they learned in the end far outweighed the discomfort they felt



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throughout. The music and celebration of her funeral was outstanding – not as a performance – but as a comfort and true witness of our caring and compassion toward those who were mourning. – And that makes a difference.

There are lots of ways to make a difference. Sometimes it's in direct action, but many times it's by showing others the way.