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Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, He Said - She Said is a venue to share differing perspectives.

## All We Have to Be

*Bob's perspective:*

I recently tripped across a song that I hadn't heard in quite some time. It amazes me that the timing of seemingly insignificant events coincide with others to make a significant impact at a particular time. The song to which I'm referring is "[All I Ever Have to Be.](#)" I'm not sure who wrote it, but it's featured in a couple albums performed by Amy Grant.

When I retired a few years ago, I had the opportunity to fill in at various parishes throughout the diocese. I enjoyed the fact that many parishes, while having similar repertoires, each stylistically approached music a little differently. As I filled in, I prided myself on being able to mimic each style so as to make my substitute work seamless with what each parish was used to experiencing. I even did that at my home parish, when I filled in for Mary on occasion.

Fast-forward a couple years, when Mary was appointed to be the Director of our Diocesan Office for Worship, and I had the opportunity to step in as Director of Liturgy and Music at my home parish (a position I held there for almost fourteen years in the late 80's and 90's). Needless to say, the parish evolved well and significantly between my departure and my return. While much is comfortably familiar, the truth is that much is quite different. As I continued to delve in, I began to feel tension in myself between keeping to what the parish was used to and presenting to them a different way of interpreting and executing music. I wanted to be respectful (and still do) of what had been designed and built so well, and at the same time not allow them to become stagnant by living in the past.

Mary and I had a number of conversations with regard to this topic. When it comes to Liturgy, Mary and I are both very "by the book," and strive for excellence from our liturgical ministers as well as from ourselves. We have worked together with *Sustaining the Journey* and many other projects over the years, having rarely experienced tense moments in our work. But now we were trekking over new ground. We came to the realization that, unlike my substitute days of cloning other musicians in stop-gap measures, I'm now once again in the position of leadership and thereby need to move forward using my particular gifts and talents, some of which I hold in common with Mary, and some that are obviously unique.

Mary is a very detail-oriented individual, while I'm a big picture person. For example, in planning prelude music for Christmas, Mary prefers to determine an exact start time and order of music (timing each piece



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in rehearsal), which is always beautifully done and ends very precisely in time for the beginning of the Mass. On the other hand, I have a general start time and order in mind, but then prefer to “fly by the seat of my pants,” a method that I have found to be very successful – producing beautiful music as well. While Mary feels comfortable in her precision, I find it personally confining. On the other hand, that which I find to be freeing and puts me at ease, leaves Mary feeling chaotic and tense.

This also holds true when Mary and I give presentations together. We often joke about her very well outlined presentations, while I like as few notes as possible. How many times have many of you seen her twitch during a presentation when I say something like, “Mary, I’m going off script here for a minute...”? Sometimes things occur to me, and I just have to go with it.

Which way is right? Both of them! And that brings us to my point. In the grand scheme of life, God has made each of us with our own unique gifts and talents. That doesn’t mean that we have permission to rest on our laurels and become stagnant – but it does, however, show that we each have our own purpose in God’s plan. There are times that God demands precision in his plan, and there are other times when he demands a little more free-style. When we constantly compare ourselves to others, when we try to be someone other than who we are, we lessen ourselves from being the true gift that God has created us to be – that integral part of the plan that only we can fill. All we ever have to be is what God made us.

*Mary’s Perspective:*

In my household, we are fans of the television show NCIS. In a recurring theme, Gibbs has a series of rules. Number 39 is, “There is no such thing as a coincidence.” Prior to sitting down to write this blog, I listened to the reflection from our diocese’s daily prayers. In that, a priest friend reminded listeners that all that what we have is God’s, and we are entrusted to be the stewards of his things in this world.

When I think of the word “steward,” I tend to think about material stuff. This priest friend reflected that our compassion, income, and time are all from God, and when we meet our Maker, we will be challenged to give a full account of our stewardship. How did we use the unique gifts and talents with which we have been blessed? Did we squander, misuse, or waste these gifts? His message was an encouragement to take inventory of our blessings, to listen for guidance, and to embrace God’s plan.

The next phrase of the song on which Bob was reflecting is “all I ever have to be is what You’ve made me – any more or less would be a step out of Your plan.” Back to coincidences... I believe sometimes we receive the same message in different forms because we are meant to pay attention. I had a dear friend that would call these “Godincidences.”



Bob's reflection sparked a spirited conversation between us. He was commenting about how, subbing at those other churches, he prided himself in being able to seamlessly mimic the style of the musician for whom he was subbing, so that the cantors, choirs, and assembly hardly noticed there was someone different on the bench. When he started playing at St. Mary Magdalene after I left, he was very respectfully trying to mimic my style. Several times, I encouraged him to make things his own. Certainly, we have some overlapping gifts and approaches to ministry, but the differences are important. Bob trying to be Mary is like me trying to teach a pig to read. All it does is frustrate me and make the pig walk away.

Okay, maybe that was an odd comparison, but here's the point. While I very much appreciate and respect Bob's approach to subbing at other churches – and I really do admire his faithfulness to the mission – there's a little piece of me that wonders what those cantors, choirs, and assemblies missed out on because of his commitment to blending in. Bob has beautiful gifts of his own right, and perhaps those parishes would have experienced God working through Bob's music in a new way, had he been true to his own style. Perhaps the singers may have learned a new technique or picked up on a nuance stemming from Bob's unique blessings, that the regular musician didn't bring to the table.

Maybe I'm more detail-oriented, and that sense of organization brings comfort to the other detail-oriented folks around us. (There are definitely some people who appreciate the nurturer in me, or the list ordering the music, with timing and who is singing what parts.) But Bob's big picture view is spurring growth in areas that had been overlooked or not fully supported during my time in that role. New ministries are developing, and musicians are blooming under Bob's tutelage. And, quite frankly, when each of us is living up to our potential, all who are impacted by our ministry experience a greater sense of God working through us.

When we write these blogs, I always try to keep in mind that our readers aren't necessarily all liturgy buffs who hang out with church nerds. So, what does it mean to be a good steward when my role is not necessarily the head of some ministry? What about the retired dad who enjoys bowling and pickleball? What about the elderly widow who is confined to her home because of mobility challenges?

That's where the whole concept of taking stock of our blessings comes to play. Maybe the elderly widow can't run around the pickleball court anymore, but she certainly can take the time to talk to someone on the phone. Consider ways she can be a good steward of that time. Perhaps the ladies' guild could use someone to collect the RSVP's for their upcoming



event. Maybe the bereavement ministry could use someone who would make phone calls to the funeral choir when a funeral notice comes in. We've been talking a lot about the process of Christian initiation recently, and best practice includes assigning a sponsor to each inquirer or catechumen (unbaptized folks who are seeking to become Catholic). That elderly widow might make a beautiful sponsor for an inquirer – she likely has time to chat, a lifetime of experience, and quite possibly a very well-formed faith life. Providing mentorship to someone new to the Church is an invaluable gift. That's good stewardship.

Trying to be something we're not just leads to frustration. Not living up to our potential leads to disappointment. Taking stock of what we have to offer, seeking God's guidance on how to best use that with which we have been blessed, and taking action to live up to that calling? That's being a good steward. That's what leads to fulfillment and happiness.