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.

Community

Mary's Perspective:

So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone may say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.
James 2:17-18

In Churchworld, we speak a lot of "community" – we talk about the community of faith, and the smaller groups that each, part of the larger assembly, have their own sense of community. For example, the St. Vincent de Paul workers form a close-knit unit, or the Music Ministry may see themselves as an extended family. I have observed lately that this concept isn't strictly relegated to those with a faith connection. For example, if you are part of a little theater group, you know that its members form a bond. Within that group, there are sub-groups, such as the lighting crew or the stage management staff, or the actors/singers/dancers.

In another venue, my husband's softball team has someone responsible for sending "Sunshine Wishes" emails. She is the communication person that lets everyone on the team know that, for example, Joe fell last week and broke his wrist, or reminds folks to congratulate Sam on the birth of his latest grandchild. The softball team members have a bond that connects them beyond just softball.

In yet another venue, if you join a gym and begin working out on a fairly predictable schedule, you'll find a group of others who also frequent the gym at the same time. Even without knowing names or intimate details of their lives, you form a sense of community – and when one of those people doesn't show up for a while, the others start musing, "I wonder what happened to Maggie… I hope she's okay…"

In a college dorm, residents form their own community. It took less than two weeks for my daughter to institute "family dinner night" on her college campus, where members of the friend group community take turns providing the meal and all eat together on a specific night of the week. We are communal creatures, and these bonds grow organically and innately.

Perhaps living through the isolation of the pandemic brought to light even more clearly how much we long for community. Technology helped us stay connected in some ways, but it was a poor replacement for physically being together. As we find our way through waves of more isolation, I have observed that, for some folks, the relational bond of community is even stronger than the reason for which the community formed. For example, with mask mandates and
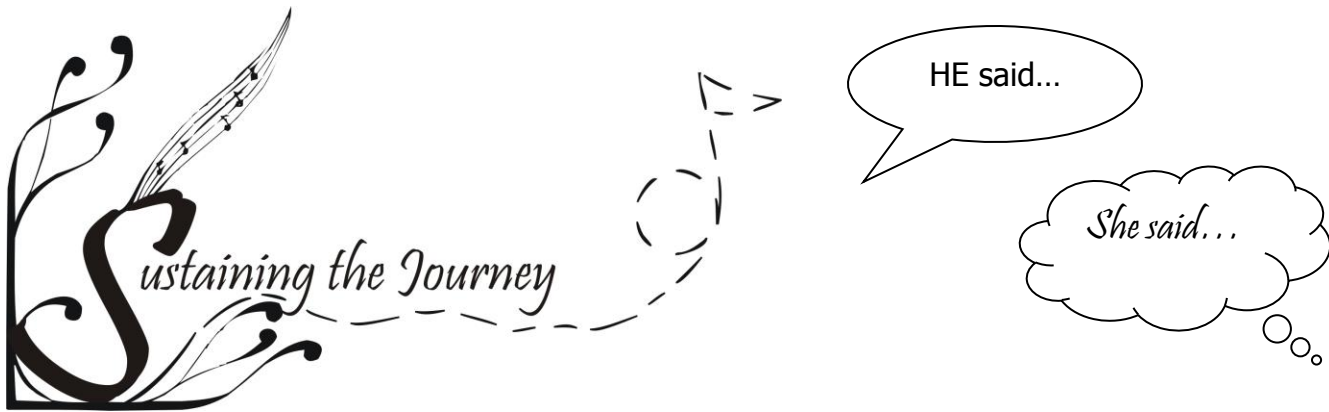
various directives, many parishes have significantly scaled back communal singing at worship. I have observed that members of the music ministries choose not to come to Mass in person – perhaps they are attending another church, or making a "spiritual communion" by watching Mass online – yet they still find ways to connect with each other at a winery or a ballgame. This isn't meant to criticize their choices; it's simply an observation.

So, if the draw of community is simply the relational aspect, speaking as a leader in Churchworld, what are we doing? If the Gospel we preach and the faith we share isn't enough of a connection to draw people to worship together in person, have we missed the boat completely?

A couple of months ago, we observed the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the deadliest day on American soil. Once we realized the tragic loss of life was a deliberate act of terrorism, being an American brought on an all new sense of community in the weeks that immediately followed. No longer were we Republican or Democrat, Christian or Jewish, Ohioan or New Yorker; we were Americans.

We started this blog over five years ago to encourage deeper thought and positive action. Developing a sense of community is wonderful, and perhaps a good way to get folks to step through the threshold – whether that doorway is to a ministry or a team or a church. But there has to be more. What keeps them connected?

If "Church" is nothing more than a weekly ritual (no matter how beautiful,) it lacks true depth. If the only thing keeping the flock connected to the faith is the desire for relational community, we may just as well be meeting weekly at the local brewery – it would be less work and probably more fun!

Faith is more than community. When folks see you, do they know what you believe? Has your faith taken root so strongly that it pulls you to community not just for the friendships, but for more? Do your actions belie your faith?

Bob's Perspective:

There are many people with whom I associate, as I'm sure most others do as well. I have a few close personal relationships. I have many professional relationships. I have a number of relationships in various recreational endeavors that I pursue. Within these also lie the relationships that I have in my faith community. The relationships that I enjoy in each of these groups vary in intensity depending on their importance in my life.

It could go without saying (but it won't) that my faith community should be the strongest of all, followed by my personal relationships, professional relationships and recreational relationships (intentionally in that specific order). To pare this down into simple terms: God, family (or those close), friends and associates would be the order.

Sustaining the Journey

HE said...

She said...
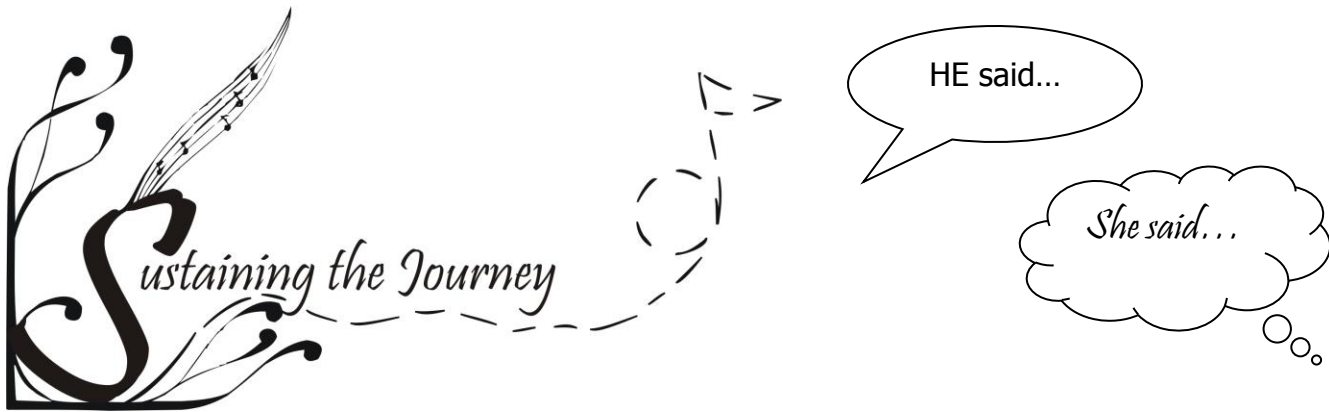
Our entomology lesson for today: The word *community* comes from the Latin word for fellowship, *communitas.* Other derivative words include *common, communicate* and *communion.* Hmmm...I wonder where this is going.

In itself, community is merely a few (or many) people who have something in common. This could range anywhere from living on the same street to enjoying a particular activity. There is, however, another aspect of community, in which we define community as a feeling. This community would be best illustrated as a family or faith community, which goes much deeper than mere physical presence.

While outside forces may play a small part, it is my contention that the lack of a communal feeling comes more from an internal, personal source (or lack thereof). Case in point, I recently attended a party at which I only knew two people. When I first showed up at the party, neither of my friends had yet arrived, so at that point in essence I knew no one. I noticed that most people were standing (or sitting) in small groups, chatting away. I also noticed a person sitting off by himself. He was nursing a beer and not interacting with anyone. I walked over and uttered a greeting, and threw in a polite icebreaker about the weather or something. He responded by saying "hello" and nothing else. It was dead silence, poor body language, etc. I quickly took stock of my options. I could remain standing there like a dweeb. OR I could get some food and sit off in a corner like my newly found counterpart. OR I could say the heck with this whole thing and hit the road. OR I could invest myself in communal interaction. It only took a short moment for me to make a decision. I walked over to one of the groups, eavesdropped for a moment, then gently moved my way into their conversation. By the time my two friends showed up at the party, I was entrenched and had no real need of their moral support, or their presence, for that matter. I was doing just fine.

The bottom line is that to be a *member* of a community takes no real effort. The guy sitting off in the corner was a member of the community merely by virtue of the fact that he was there. He didn't seem to have much interest in the others, and apparently the feeling was mutual. In the same way, throwing money at a church or other charitable institution isn't the same as taking proper time to worship, or personally reaching out to help someone in need. "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name"* (Matthew 18:20), isn't the same as, "*Where I am gathered at my TV set."* To be a meaningful part of a community (and to have that community become meaningful to one's self) takes commitment and work. Faith life takes commitment and work. Family life takes commitment and work. In this world of sound byte communication and instant gratification, it's sad to see heartfelt communities (both faith and family) slowly crumbling – or at least dwindling into much less than their potential. How should we respond?

Just sayin'….