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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. *We said* reflects some mutual food for thought.

(And then again, sometimes we're exactly on the same page – just sayin' – *Bob*)

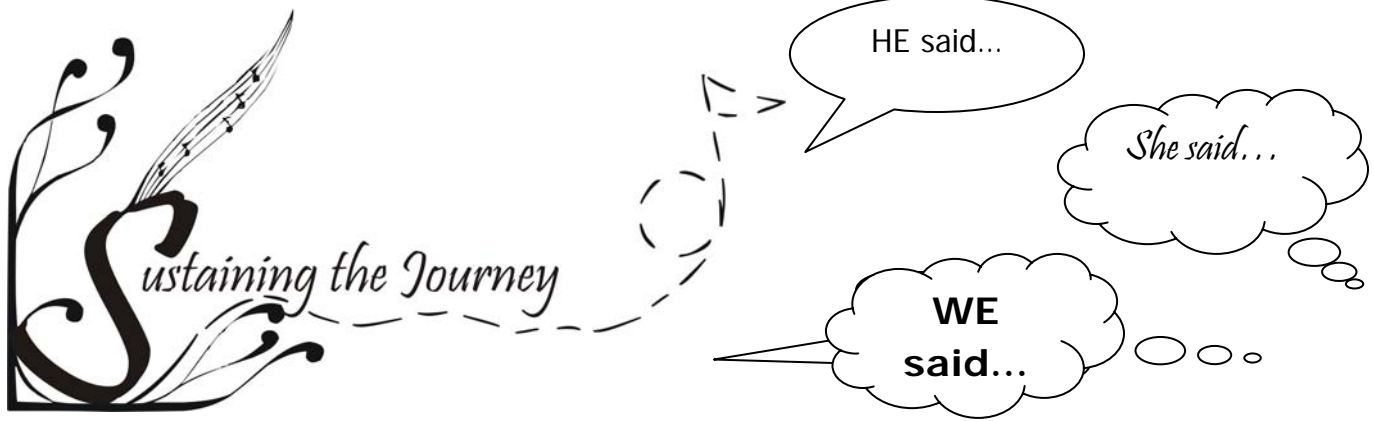
## **He Said - She Said - We Said: Caring for the Previous Generation**

We write a lot about nurturing the upcoming generation of musicians. Our parishes focus a lot of energy on how to engage youth and young families. Churches recognize that survival is dependent upon connecting with younger folks, who (hopefully) will pick up where the older folks are no longer able due to physical limitations, location, or health restrictions. And all of that is, indeed, true.

But the harsh reality is that "today's generation" is not as connected, not as financially supportive, and not picking up where their predecessors left off. There are many reasons - events vying for time, technology luring attention, perhaps even a watering-down of how the faith is taught. When one of our seasoned members dies, it often leaves a gap in several ministries, as well as a significant fiscal impact. We find that there are not a pool of willing volunteers who will cover as much ground as the seasoned member did....not in time, talent, or treasure.

Perhaps this appears to be a gloomy perspective. For Bob (crotchety guy that he is), it's just reality. For Mary (the Walking Pep Talk), it's perhaps a challenge. Either way, we have been spending some time thinking about, and praying for, that previous generation of seasoned members. How do we stay connected to long-time members and nurture them in their final years?

Both of us have stumbled upon some great strategies! (Okay, perhaps some of these were well planned, but often our best results are a happy surprise.) One of the most fruitful ministries at Mary's parish is our Mourning Glories funeral choir. Currently we have nearly 40 members who sing and pray at funerals - significantly more than our weekend music ministry - and the average age is well over 75. This is a great ministry for the retired, as it is a flexible commitment. They sing when they are able, funerals are almost always in the morning (no night-time driving), and many of our members have joined because of the support they received in their own time of need. When folks are hurting, and at their darkest moments, our Mourning Glories sing the words that grieving throats can't choke out. When they file into church behind the casket of a loved one, often they look up with surprise and gratitude to see more than a dozen members of the parish



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there to comfort and pray with them. It reminds them that they are part of a bigger picture; members of a greater family. And, after some time has offered healing, they want to pay it forward.

Bob's parish offers a vibrant wellness ministry. From tai chi to chair yoga, there are activities suitable for the retired crowd, tailored to their needs. Mary's parish has an Afghan Ministry - folks who knit or crochet lap throws, prayer shawls, etc. for anyone struggling in mind, body or spirit. It is a tremendous ministry of care, and their meetings are mid-afternoon, again so folks don't need to get up too early nor drive at dark.

Both of our parishes enlist the help of the seasoned members to assist with liturgical ministry, as altar servers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and coordinators whose help is invaluable at funerals and school masses. In addition, we use our seasoned volunteers for projects. Mary's parish often prepares bulk mailings, and our volunteers provide much needed assistance to enable vital communication with all of our members. (Every one of our mailing team - often 20 at a time - have gray hair and sincerely appreciate a good donut!) From the folks who water the plants to those who count ticket returns, our long-time members have so much to offer that keeps them spry and helps build the Kingdom of God.

So how do we nurture the previous generation? Feed them. Provide spiritual nourishment at times that are convenient to them. Invite them to be part of the bigger picture - in ministry and for projects. Express the big picture and solicit their ideas on how to make wishes a reality. Encourage them to remain active within their abilities, and to mentor the next generation for when mobility or health becomes more limited. And keep buying donuts!