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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.

## Value Beyond the Tangible

*Mary's Perspective*

Let me sum up a tenet know to all Church ministers:

*Ministry = tons of work, no pay.*

For many whose heads are nodding right now, I could probably leave it at that. However, we might delve a bit deeper...

I have been connected to Church ministry for 35 years (remember, I started as a child). There have been times when there was budget for my effort, and I received a stipend, or perhaps even a salary. There have been other times when ministry was simply a matter of doing the right thing, because we are baptized priest, prophet, and king. If I believed the only reason to continue ministry was for the paycheck, I could easily be demoralized at my perceived worth. Consider some other examples:

If an outsider (i.e., not familiar with the Catholic Church) were to attend Mass for the first time, they might have a variety of impressions or thoughts of their experience. "Ritual seems interesting; the whole stand/sit/kneel thing isn't intuitive but they all seem to get it." "Heard some interesting stories and sang some good songs. That preacher was insightful." "Oh, now they pass the basket - I guess they have to pay for stuff somehow." "Wait, is this it? All I get is a little wafer of bread and a sip of wine from a cup that everyone else has sipped from? What a rip-off!"

Switch gears to family life. My husband and I have been blessed to have always been able to arrange for one of us to be at home with our children. We have done this intentionally. Whether it was working from home or only one of us working outside the house, it was important to us. Certainly we made some sacrifices, and adjusted our plans to accommodate it, but my kids know their dad and that's awesome. We've been there through doctor appointments and school projects and the highs and the lows that go with a household full of children. Had we not chosen this path, our bank account might be significantly different. But do I believe there is value to having a parent home with the kids? Absolutely.

So back to ministry... Does the music we play have an impact? Is there value to dragging my butt out of bed every Sunday morning and joining others on their journey? What about "above and beyond" commitments, like helping with the parish festival, or packing lunches for the homeless shelter, or volunteering at vacation bible school? Does that have value? We don't get paid in dollars. But we might actually be having a valuable impact. We might be the tool needed to change people's lives for the better.

Whether you are seen by the VBS kids as being alive with the Spirit, or providing the comfort of reassuring music during a funeral, I believe there is value beyond the tangible. Every time we as ministers commit to improving our craft, or we take the time to do our ministry well, we have the potential to touch hearts. Far beyond financial reward, those blessed by our ministry recognize the value. Perhaps sometimes we need to be reminded, also, of the benefits beyond the tangible.



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We've written a number of blogs reflecting on folks whose lives have been touched by our ministry. I suppose when you're in it long enough, you're bound to get some feedback both positive and negative! Of any who have been impacted by what we do, I can't think of a time when the benefits were tangible. Just in case you need a few more examples...

Spending time with a fellow minister, having lunch, comparing best practices, commiserating over challenges we face? Intangible value to both parties! Volunteering on a committee for a professional organization, to help determine direction and growth? Value in both the wisdom you contribute and the recognition or opened doors you receive - but none of it tangible. Taking the time to read to a young person in your life? Definitely intangible valuable to both you and the young person. Sitting with an elderly friend in hospice? You won't ever regret it, and you won't earn a penny from it. Need I go on?

My point in all of this is that sometimes - often - the most worthwhile things we do may have no perceived tangible value. Does that mean it's not worth doing? Sometimes, one needs to see beyond the tangible to touch the transcendent.

How's that for food for thought?

*Bob's Perspective*

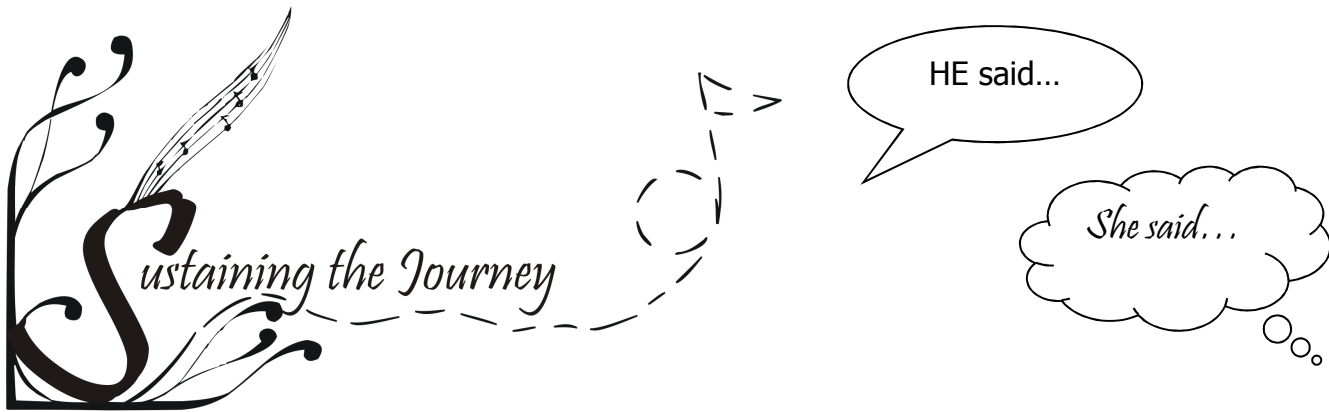
Early on in my life, I gave up music for a time to pursue wealth and fortune. Taking a very lucrative position in the private sector, I made a lot of money (way, way more than a twenty-something kid should make) and was always surrounded by colleagues and clients who held the same status. Money flowed in and out of my pockets like water. Although I could afford (and had) just about anything I wanted from a material point of view, I felt very lonely and unfulfilled. At the same time I had become very money oriented and was highly driven to make even more. While I was outwardly having a grand old time, inwardly I hated my life and myself.

One day, I looked in the mirror and asked, "What in the hell are you doing?" I had all but given up music (the one thing that always brought me joy) and was selling myself out for nothing that would bring me any real happiness in the long run. I spent that afternoon packing up many of my worthless-expensive possessions. Borrowing a friend's boat, I took the packaged items out onto Lake Erie and chucked them all overboard (literally). Bringing the boat back in, I went to the office, dropped the keys on the Office Manager's desk and walked out - never to look back.

A very short time later, a friend and I started a music project. Within a month's time we were playing a pretty decent schedule, I didn't have much more than a couple nickels to rub together and was happy as a clam. Then through a series of more than coincidental events, I became involved in church music and lay ecclesial ministry - a semi-lucrative profession that (for the most part) has served me well for over forty years.

Don't get me wrong. Anyone who knows me on a personal level will attest to the fact that my life is far from Utopian. I've had my share of ups and downs like anyone else. However, I may not have everything in life that I want, but God has always given me everything in life that I need. Why does he choose to bless me in such a way? I have no idea other than the fact that he loves me. And I'm pretty sure that I'm not the only one riding that train.

As I look around at our consumer driven society, I see more and more people who remind me of myself as a twenty-something. People are inundated with expensive-worthless stuff - and are in debt up to their eye-balls because they can't



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even afford all the expensive-worthless stuff they own. Things that were luxuries a few year ago are now *perceived* as life necessities; and many who own so much aren't even outwardly happy any more.

How many times do we see families sitting in a restaurant all glaring at their i-phones instead of enjoying each other's companionship? How many people pay *hundreds of dollars* each month for cable and/or internet, then incessantly glue themselves in front of their TV and/or computer rather than exercise or socialize? How many people lease cars or apartments they can't afford, then work (and over-work) just to make the minimum monthly payments? I'm not saying that cable, internet, top of the line cars and expensive apartments are bad things. The truth is that "things" can neither be bad or good – they only just exist. Bad or good comes from how human beings allow "things" to influence or control their lives.

Many times, expensive tangible things can be worthless, while cost-free intangible things can be priceless. Is an expensive i-phone more valuable than enjoying the company of a loved one or seeing the smile of a child? Are cable and internet more valuable than having close relationships or keeping a fit body? Is over-working to pay for an expensive car or apartment more valuable than taking time for some rest and relaxation or enjoying the simple things in life?

So what's my point? I'm not going to quote an over-used cliché like "Money can't buy happiness," because that's not even necessarily true. However, I will say that I'm glad and grateful that I'm no longer there.

- Just sayin'