

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.

Volunteerism Vs. Ministry

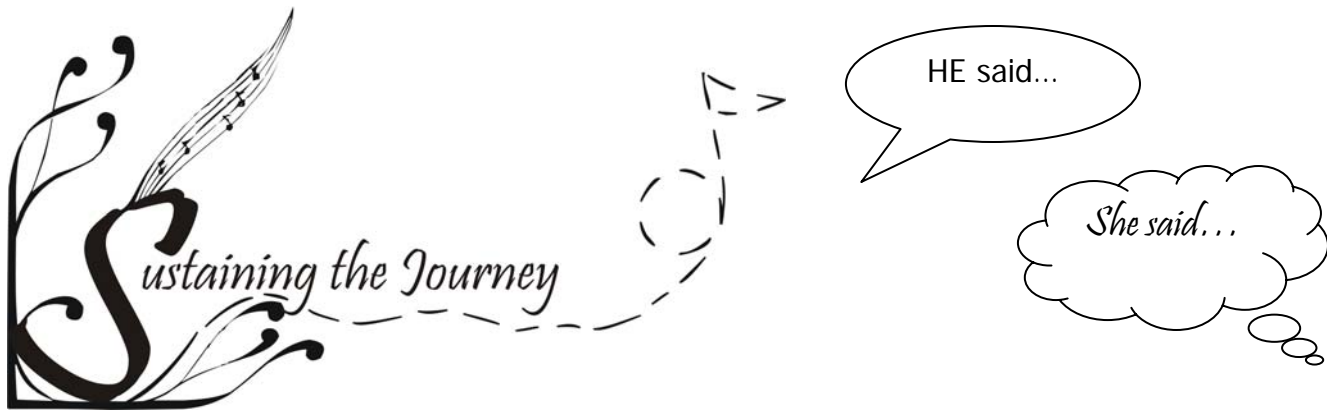
Bob's Perspective:

I think that the best way of recruiting and motivating people to come forward in service is by shifting our thoughts from that of volunteerism to a sense of ministry. Some years ago, I attended a national convention of the American Guild of Organists. The opening ceremony was held at Trinity Cathedral in downtown Cleveland and the address was given by Rev. Peter Gomes of Boston, who was the national chaplain of this organization. His address started off with reading of the story from Genesis about Cain and Abel. I couldn't help but wonder what this had to do with music ministry.

After he finished the reading, he asked those assembled to identify Cain's sin. The consensus: Cain's sin was that he murdered his brother Abel. Rev. Gomes then offered another perspective, a perspective which changed my entire way of thinking about parish ministry. He suggested that Cain's sin was that he gave garbage to God. In the story, Abel's sacrifice was from the best he had to offer, and God found it pleasing and acceptable. On the other hand, Cain's offering was from his leftovers and God rejected it. Cain became jealous and in a fit of rage killed Abel. But it was Cain giving less than his best that caused the whole unfortunate scenario.

Rev. Gomes then made a very pointed statement. He said, "as Ministers, we have no right to our positions, if we only intend to give of our leftovers and not of our best." This leads me to question each time a liturgical minister (Music Minister, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, Lector, Altar Server, Usher, et al.) fails to show up for their assigned liturgy or get a replacement when scheduled. Are these ministries simply a volunteer thing to do on the weekend in order to feel good about ourselves or to look good in front of others? Hopefully, the answer to that question is "No."

Being in any of these roles has nothing to do with volunteerism (giving from our surplus). Rather these rolls are all about ministry (giving from our best). Ministry is not a right, but a privilege and a duty. The purpose of these ministerial roles are to give God our personal best through serving the worshiping community. So what is our best? Best has nothing to do with perfection. Our best is being faithful to the community by acting responsibly and with honor. Our best is being attentive during liturgical celebrations. Furthermore, in order to give our best, we must nurture and grow in our own spiritual lives, as well as in the spiritual life of the community. This not only applies to liturgical ministers, but to all who assemble for liturgy as well. Do we just put in our time week in and week out, or do we give the celebration our undivided attention and our best effort? As we look forward to new and better tomorrows, let's take time to evaluate our intentions and work toward giving our personal best and not just our leftovers.



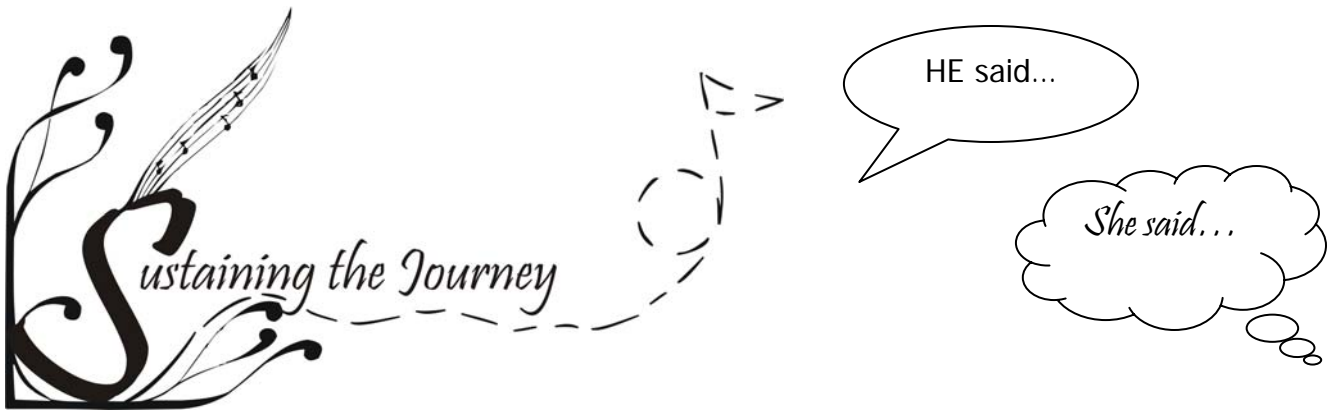
Mary's perspective:

Our choir takes a break every summer, so we typically have a wrap-up party (dinner, of course!) after Pentecost. It's a nice opportunity to spend time socially and to review the past year. We talk about what went well, what wasn't so good, and what we could do to improve both our experience of ministry and the assembly's worship. We are respectful but brutally honest with each other, and no topic is off-limits. Sometimes the conversation is quiet specific, as in "we really liked the new song we sang for All Souls or that entrance chant we used in Lent". Sometimes the conversation is more thought-provoking, as in "how can we be more welcoming so more folks join us?" Often, members in the same room have differing opinions: "We don't use enough contemporary music." "We use too much contemporary music." "We like when you introduce new music." "You use too much new music; it makes my binder too heavy."

This year, we talked a lot about attendance of our members at practices and masses. Especially as we get closer to summer, a number of our choir members come to practice but are unable to sing with the choir at weekend liturgy. A number of perspectives were offered... Is it better to come to what you can (i.e., if I can only make practice but not Mass), or not come at all? Our harmonies have a significantly different balance when we have full SATB at practice, but then Sunday's choir is composed of one man and the rest women. From a purely artistic standpoint, it can feel disappointing to spend the time working on parts at practice, but then need to sing in unison at mass. However, having a full group at practice energizes us all, and we learn better when supported by each other.

For some, their participation in the music ministry program feeds them. Whether their time is spent at practice, Mass, or both, being part of this group is a large part of how they express their spirituality and how they experience God. If being at practice fills them, and they need to attend their son's travel baseball game Sunday, all is well. For others, it's a calling to lead the assembly's worship, and their experience feels incomplete if they are not "all in" (read our 7/15/16 blog). They are the ones who rearrange other pieces of life to make sure they can attend both practice and mass.

I might not have come to the distinction on my own, but I think Bob's delineation of volunteerism and ministry fits this situation. Those who participate in liturgical ministry because it is how they express their spirituality and how they are fed might be volunteers. Don't get me wrong – we need plenty of volunteers! They are often the lifeblood of the church. However, those who see liturgical ministry as a calling, a privilege, and a responsibility? They are the ones who understand the nature of ministry. They are the ones who give of their best, not their surplus, to serve the worshipping community. The volunteer seeks what is best for self, while the minister seeks what is best for the community. Both are vital, both give to God and neighbor, but the minister keeps reaching higher to give of their personal best.



As I write this, I've been reflecting on the scriptures about Martha and Mary. I've always struggled with stories about them, because I can definitely relate to both Martha and Mary. Part of me wants to judge who was "right", but the reality is that both are needed to make the story complete. Similarly, both volunteers and ministers are needed to make our picture complete – yet we are called to a deeper understanding. Perhaps as we take some time these summer months to be restored and renewed, we might also look inward to evaluate our intentions and recommit ourselves to being true ministers.

Good grief, I ended up right where Bob did again!