

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.

A Powerful Organ

Mary's Perspective:

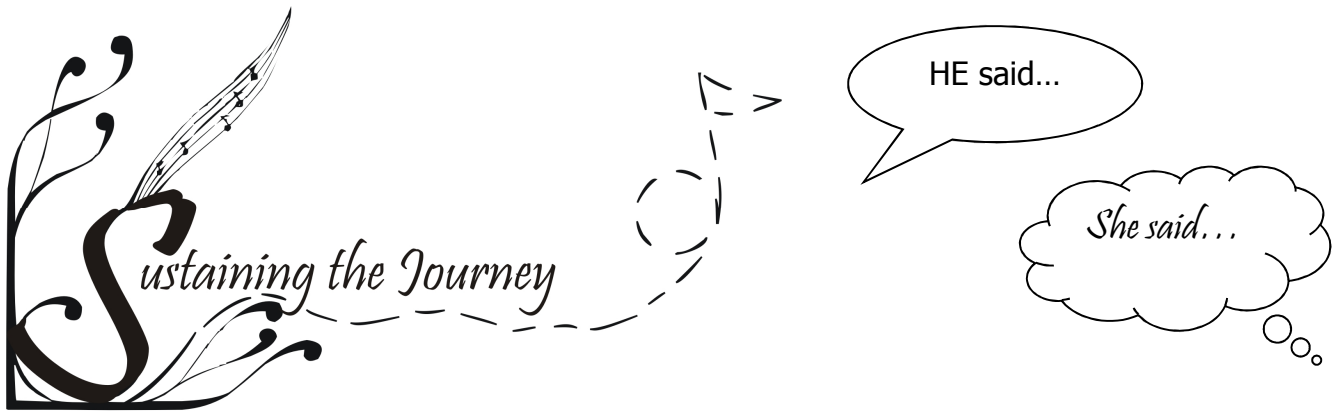
Yes I am a musician writing about an organ – but not the one you’re imagining. As many of us are embarking on the beginning of another “season” of ministry, I thought I’d share some interesting feedback I recently received. This is an excerpt of a thank-you note I received from the daughter of one of our parishioners who recently died:

“Mom always appreciated music but was never much of a singer when we were growing up. Many years later, we noticed that Mom was starting to sing in church. Ironically, as her memory issues grew worse, her knowledge of the lyrics and her singing improved. I’m not sure what to make of that, except to say that I think you inspired her to praise God in new ways, which brought her joy...”

Isabelle and Bob came to church faithfully every Saturday. Actually, several weeks ago was the first Saturday that I saw Bob in church by himself – later to find out that Isabelle had died that morning. These were “regular folks”. Sat in the same pew every Saturday. Always had a kind word for Father. I often caught Bob gazing at me during mass (which I found unnerving). It wasn’t until after her funeral that I realized the meaning behind his gaze. As he was slowly losing his beloved, Bob took great comfort in knowing that she was peaceful and growing closer to God. That offers us all powerful solace.

We don’t always get to know how our ministry impacts others. And sometimes, it can seem like we church musicians are surrounded by death. We are blessed to have a small part in some of the most momentous times of peoples’ lives – whether it’s welcoming new life in baptism, or marriage, or a funeral. But have no doubt – ministry changes lives.

The brain is a complicated organ. It controls everything from blinking and breathing, to learning facts and developing artistry. Our brains constantly question, and seek solutions. Sometimes we can’t harness the strength of our brains – they literally have a mind of their own! (Just ask anyone who has dealt with epilepsy.) Even when the mind is succumbing to the ravages of dementia, the brain finds other paths. Faith challenges us to look beyond scientific answers.



Do I believe that Isabelle found new connections to the Almighty through music? Absolutely.

We don't always recognize that there is a greater purpose to what we do. Sometimes providing music (whether as the accompanist or cantor or as part of the assembly's choir) becomes routine, and we go through the motions. Sometimes we forget to be mindful and remember the beauty to which we are called. Music can transform relationship. That awesome organ – the brain – can use our music to forge new paths, even in an aging and physically failing body.

We are beginning another academic year, and getting back to the routine of school and meetings and choir practices. This time, I challenge you: don't allow it to be just routine. The next time you sit in the pew or at the instrument and you look around, be mindful of those whom your music serves. Recognize that you can make Scripture come alive with beauty. Get yourself out of the way to make room for God to transform our lowly "work" into His plan. It's worth the effort. Believe that you make a difference.

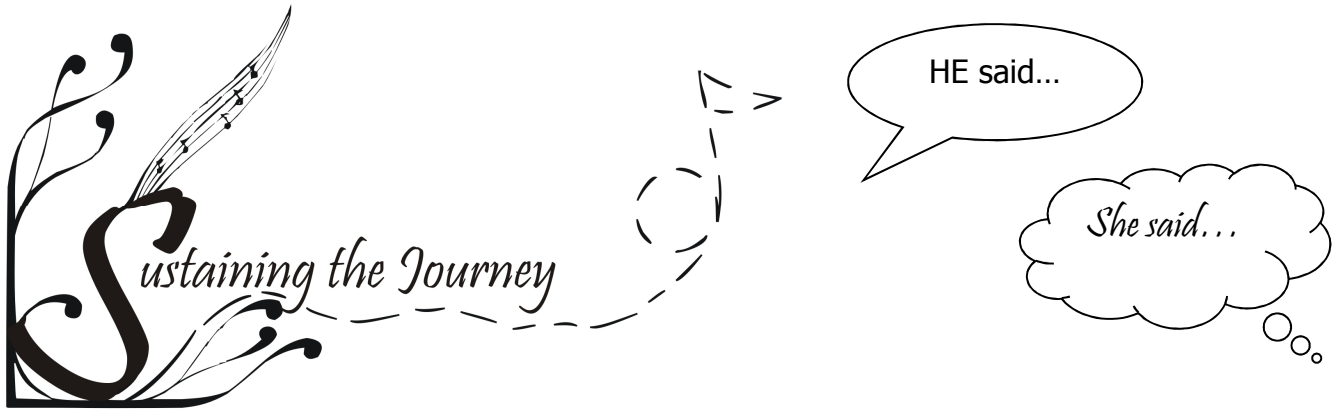
Bob's Perspective:

Being mindful is much more than the act of self-awareness or being focused on a particular task. It's about deeply connecting with our Lord and his people, not just as objects or in theory – but as living and breathing beings. When this happens, we not only transform ourselves, but we become the catalyst of transformation for those around us. Becoming a mindful individual takes a great deal of work, practice and patience with others and ourselves.

One of my favorite mantras to choristers, instrumentalists and Assembly alike is, "Sing it like you believe it." This isn't to infer that disbelief exists in the ranks. Rather, it's an invitation to mindfully delve deeper into the text and music, to internalize it, and then realize it (project it with emotion and feeling). I'm not talking about a Broadway type performance, but just honest emotion and feeling. For example, there is a particular setting of the Gloria to which our Assembly extraordinarily relates. I'm always floored by the emotion and energy that they project every time it's sung – one can't help but be mindful of the sense of a true connection between God and his people in joyous song. But it doesn't stop there. After they sing that Gloria, the rest of the music in the celebration rings with as much (if not more) vibrancy and feeling. It's truly a snowball effect.

Music in song is one of the greatest gifts that God has given us. God loves music in song. As a matter of fact, there are approximately 1646 times that 'music' or 'song' are mentioned in the Bible. (I did a word count of the New American version.) To paraphrase Pollyanna, "If God took the trouble to say something 1646 times, he must think it's pretty important."

In a document entitled, "The Spirit of Liturgy," Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "The singing of the Church comes ultimately out of love. It is the utter depth of love that produces the singing. 'Cantare amantis est,' says St. Augustine, singing is a lover's thing. In so saying, we come again to the Trinitarian interpretation of Church music. The Holy Spirit is love, and it



is he who produces the singing. He is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit who draws us into love for Christ and so leads to the Father."

Love is the deepest of human emotions – and one of the strongest. Emotion is produced by the brain as a result of proper stimulus, or so we think. In lieu of giving you another word count, I'll refer to 1 John 4:12b, 16 – "If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him." Developing and training our mind to be more focused, using the power of our brain to continually be aware of God's presence in the world, in others and within ourselves will increase the effects of the love of which Pope Benedict was referring and will perfect in us the love upon which John expounded. In happier times we will be ever more joyful. In sad or difficult times, we will be more at peace.

The brain is 'a powerful organ.'