

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.

## Culture and Counterculture in Worship

*Mary's perspective:*

We live in a consumeristic society. Social media has us convinced that the world revolves around us, and that our personal happiness or satisfaction are of primary importance. Yes, these are generalities, and technologies have certainly changed life, but people of the current generation have a different perspective than previous generations. For our grandparents, you took what life threw at you, and you made the best of it. For today's generation, you see what life throws at you and then use whatever means available to improve it.

This is particularly true when it comes to participation in the life of the Church. Our grandparents lived within a specific parish boundary, and that was the parish they attended. If they were so inclined, perhaps they became involved in that parish, through volunteering or ministry. If they didn't consider the parish to be the best - for whatever reason - they still worshipped there because that's where they belonged. Perhaps their involvement helped to make it a better parish.

The current generation has many more resources, and so the lines of parish boundaries aren't quite so impactful. If one parish doesn't fit your style, go try out another. Many of us know people who have "church shopped" - or perhaps we, ourselves, are the shoppers - in order to find a parish that feels "right". Whether it's the music, or the pastor, or the ministry opportunities, or the outreach offerings that draw, often those that attend a particular parish do so out of conscious choice based on what fits their need.

I recently went to lunch with a number of fellow music directors. As we got to chatting about our jobs, it became quite obvious that, although we all carried the same or similar titles, our duties were quite different. In fact, the very way we presented ourselves was quite different:

- "I'm a composer. I write the psalms or entrance chants that our parish uses."
- "I lead the folk group. We don't do much harmony, and we really are more of a social bunch, but we like to sing at Mass."
- "I have a great accompanist, and I really appreciate being able to direct our choir on more showy four-part anthems that we use for prelude or offertory."
- "I am an organist. I play Renaissance music before Mass starts so that folks truly focus and appreciate the artistry of liturgy."



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- "I'm a liturgist. Although we don't sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, my group prays well - and God makes the music good."
  - "I direct both the music and the choir. Sometimes my biggest challenge is reigning in the diva cantor and getting the tenors to pay attention, all at the same time!"
  - "My responsibilities include not just the music folks, but all the liturgical ministers. The ten minutes before Mass can be a flurry of chaos for me!"

All of these are valid considerations, and obviously the needs of each parish are as different as the people who make up the parish. But it got me to thinking...

If, among a group of music directors, not one of us did the same job, isn't that true of those whom our ministry serves? People in the pews come for many different reasons. Some seek solace or refuge or acceptance. Some come because they feel the need to give back. Some come to be entertained, or to prevent extra time in purgatory. Some come because they prefer this pastor's homilies to the one down the street. Most come for a myriad of reasons.

Given that, then shouldn't our music ministry touch souls in different ways? Certainly some of our music should offer opportunity for contemplation, perhaps the comfort of peaceful lyrics, or the inspiration to sing loudly. It's easy to fall into the trap of limiting our scope. We've written blogs before about how some folks participate in music ministry to fill, while others come to be filled. Our perspective may be influenced by our motivations - if I believe singing in the choir is important because music inspires me, then the logical next step is that the music I sing should be inspiring to others.

I would propose that our music ministry should include a variety of genres and styles because the people we serve come with a variety of needs. It's not enough to simply have the "traditional choir Mass" or the "contemporary Mass" because the music at liturgy needs to express the vastness of Scripture and of our faith. It's more than personal preference. It's using the artistry of music to bring to life the beauty of the Word. And beauty is not limited to one style.

I've heard people say they like coming to a certain church because they like the pastor's sense of humor, or they like the music, or because Mass is only 40 minutes. Whatever the reason, today's assembly attends Mass out of a consumerist perspective - they will go where they are fed well. To quote Kevin Costner, "if you build it, they will come."

Obviously, people have more depth than that - we have an innate spiritual longing - but the reality is that it's easier to respond to that longing where we feel welcome and comfortable. And so we choose the church where we feel comfortable.

As a minister of the church, it is of paramount importance that my music reflects the dignity of the liturgy and be true to the Word. It also needs to be accessible for people to sing, and pleasing to the ear. Balancing the needs of the Word, the people, the ritual, and the notes on paper can be a challenge at times. But just as each of us sees our role in that balancing act slightly differently, the goal is the same. And just as the assembly in the pews are each unique, with different needs, wants, and longings, so, too, our music must reach each of them.



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I started writing this blog because I was surprised that a gathering of fellow music ministers it almost felt like we had more differences than commonalities. But it made me ponder the people who come to church. We obviously have "worshiper" in common. I suspect we have much more that is different. Then again, look at the 12 that Jesus called.

If our music is to touch hearts and help foster the Christian relationship, then it better reflect the many *different* faces that gather for prayer. Perhaps if we do that well, they will come.

*Bob's perspective:*

Our society is enamored with consumerism and instant gratification. That's the reality with which we need to deal. At the same time, I don't believe that we need to let these attitudes rule the way in which we worship. By her very nature, the Catholic Church calls us to be countercultural. Just because people like something doesn't mean that it's necessarily good for them. There are many things that I like: pizza, tequila, licorice, donuts, and Twinkies to name just a few. Enjoying any of them once in a while is a good thing, but a steady diet of any (or better yet, all) of them would be disastrous to my health and wellbeing.

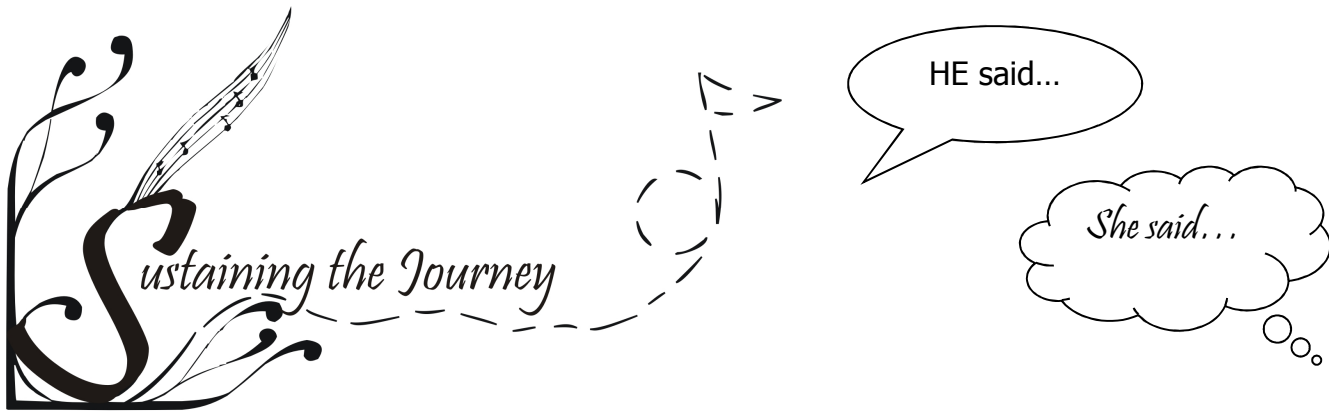
The keys to living healthy include moderation and discipline. Too much of any one thing isn't healthy. The same can be said for the practicing of our faith. Countercultural to this society are the concepts of patience, understanding and respect for one another.

So what does this all have to do with parish ministry? People have different reasons for coming to church. I've talked about this many times before. To reiterate: some come to give glory, honor and thanksgiving to God, others come because they're searching for something and still others come because they're running away from something. Some people come to serve and others come to be served. These are all valid reasons and need to be respected. At the same time, we need to keep the reason and purpose for Sunday Liturgy in the forefront.

The Liturgy, first and foremost is to give thanksgiving and worship to our God. In the midst of that, we also raise up to him the needs and concerns of our community and ourselves. Too many people leave right after Communion and so miss another integral part: to be sent forth to bring the Good News to others – in the way we speak, in the way we live, and in the way we act toward one another.

In the midst of this worship, we offer ourselves in time, talent and treasure. This isn't just about money and participating in the extracurricular activities of the Parish. It's about offering our time, treasure and talent in worship. That being said, each parish is blessed with various levels of each of these. Not every parish has an abundance of all three of these categories from a societal perspective. I'm not sure that God expects us to be perfect, but I'm pretty sure that he wants our personal best.

In terms of music, the personal best of a parish may be the use of a three or four manual pipe organ and a seventy member choir and college educated musicians. For others it may be an old piano that barely stays in tune and a few people who show up to sing when they can. Then of course are the many who fall somewhere in the middle of those. All



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of these need to be taken in to consideration and respected. None of these are bad. They're merely different means to the same end.

The same holds true for the selection of music. While we always need to observe the three criteria for selecting music for the liturgy (liturgical, pastoral and musical), we need to be careful. In putting too much emphasis on one particular aspect we run the danger of short-changing the others.

The balance we need to achieve should be respectful to both the culture of our society (or community) as well as the countercultural nature of worship in the Church. The bottom line is that the opportunities for worship that we offer should be done with as much excellence as possible, given the available resources (time, treasure and talent), authentically reflect the culture of that particular parish, and remain true and respectful to the counterculture that is the Church. A daunting task? Maybe. Worth the effort? Definitely!

*Blog Reader's perspective:*

Re: Music at Mass..... Having been a Lector at my parish St. Mary Magdalene in willowick, i find I can relate better to the Liturgy if the music follows or leads with the Reading of the Mass.

I loved the Readings from St. Paul... i could just imagine him leaving a group of people .. after told them how he became a Christian... and what the words of Jesus were..... but then to want to send them a letter to remind them again... and again.....

I always welcome music during the Mass, especially when each one... entrance... offertory.... communion.... recessional.... changes the tempo somewhat.... allowing me to be more alert, or allows me to take in the music with the action ( receiving the eucharist) ... and reflecting on the mystery of recieving the body of Christ... . And after proclaiming the Readings ( When i was a Lector) or hearing them now..... I am absorb the words of the readings along with the music of the Consecration..... the Recessional.... always reminded me to take both the Word of God out with me as I take the Body of Christ with me..

I realize how much work goes into he planning of the music with the Liturgical year .. and I fully appreciate it.... i thank all Choir directors, Musicians, who do this .... sometimes one does it ALL.. i doubly appreciate them...

I am fortunate to have had both Bob and Mary here at St. Mary Magdalene, plus presiders who take their homilies into the readings and into our lives.. I think you for an oppportunity to express my feelings about our Liturgy and our Music.....two of my favorites .. "Here I am Lord," and "We will Rise Again."

With love..... My Personal Wish was when it was time to read a Letter from St. Paul.... i could come rushing up the aisle... saying Hey Everyone.... We just got a Letter from Paul!!! then read it !!