

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.

That Person

Mary's Perspective:

With Thanksgiving right around the corner, our thoughts turn to gratitude. A dear friend showed me a very powerful video:

<https://iamfearlessoul.com/say-thank-you-motivational-speech-featuring-denzel-washington/>

This is a motivational speech featuring Denzel Washington that reminds us how important it is to be grateful. It is not religious, nor political. It is simply a reminder that “giving thanks for all you do have not only makes you feel abundant and blessed instantly, it also attracts more to be grateful for.”

One part of this stood out to me:

Get grateful for that one person that has had an impact in your life, or many people if you are so blessed. Then get grateful you CAN CHOOSE to be that person for someone else, that one that makes a difference in someone else's life, no matter how small.

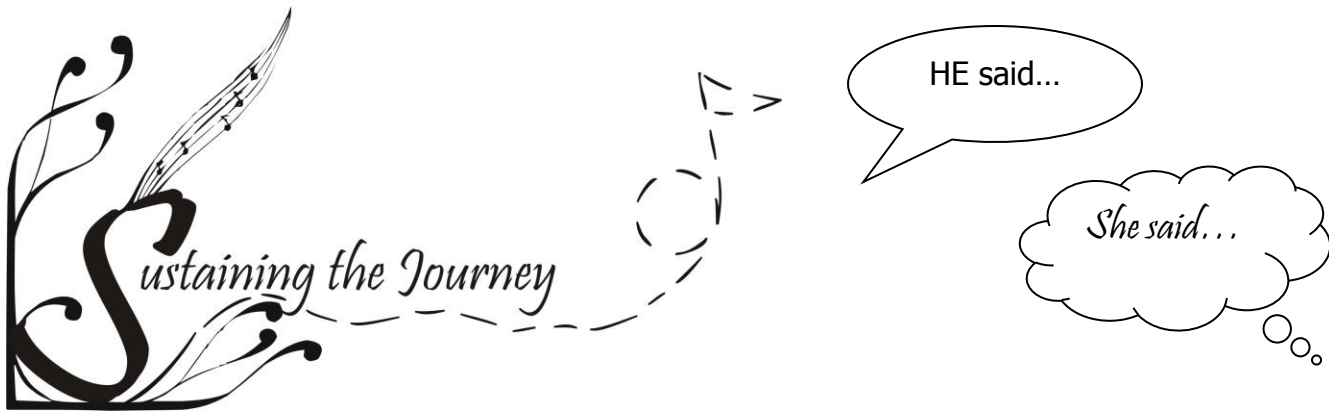
I have been blessed over the years to be impacted (in Church terms, “formed”) by many amazing people. I am who I am – liturgist, musician, business woman, wife, mom – because of the impact of those who chose to make a difference in my life. I am humbled when I observe my children choosing to be that person for others. As church ministers, we have a unique and frequent opportunity to be that person who makes a difference in someone else's life. Through our music, our compassion, or journeying together, we *can* make a difference.

I could wax on, but the message is obvious.

The challenge?

1. Contemplate who has made a difference in your life.
2. Tell them.

Today, I am grateful for the wonderfully wise, compassionate, inspiring woman who shared that video with me. She has made a difference in many lives, including my own. I have learned much from her on how to be a minister, friend, parent, and woman of God. Thank you, Mama Lou.



Bob's Perspective:

Just like Mary, there have been a countless number of people in my life – parents, wife, family, friends, teachers and acquaintances - who have all had part in the formation of Bob Soeder. However, when I think about my ministerial life, one name rises to the top – Jim.

This story is a bit long and somewhat sordid, but seeing as how I've not put this down on paper before today, I ask for your kind indulgence in this attempt.

The epic saga begins a little over forty years ago. Through a whole chain of unrelated events I found myself playing bass for a "Guitar Group" serving at the "Gym Mass" at my home parish. Since the details of how that came to be parallels (at least in length) Homer's Iliad, I'll skip the details for now and leave that for another blog someday.

At that time, the Parish Music Director (Jim) had very little (if anything) to do with this weekly celebration. It was, for the most part, its own little community doing its own thing, but he would occasionally come over to thank us all for "taking ownership" of the "Gym Mass." At the time, I wasn't the director of the group and had no real desire to serve in that capacity. Rather, for a young twenty-something, playing with the group was a great way to not be bored at Sunday Mass.

As time went on, I noticed that living in the corner of the gym was descent little spinet piano. (*Yeah Mary, that's the one that's now in your office...just sayin'.*) On occasion, we would roll it over to our music area and I would switch off from bass to piano. At this point, I had been playing organ and piano for about ten years, had a few years of college behind me (performance major), quit school to go on the road, navigated some twists and turns in another profession, and now made a decent living as a musician for the last four years – mostly with bands.

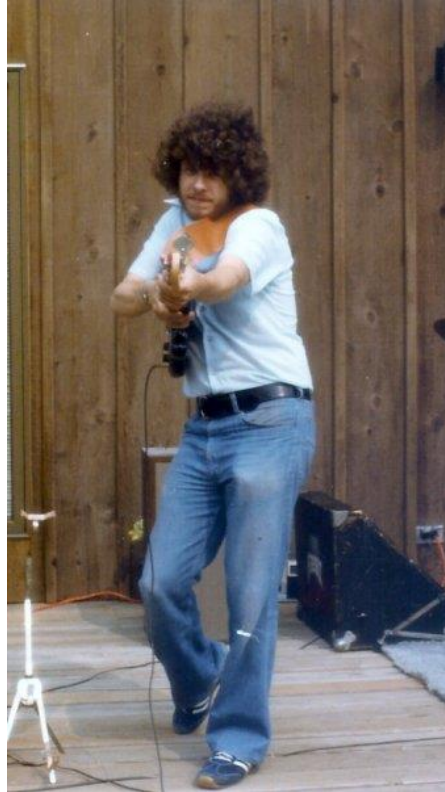
One Sunday, Jim came over and heard me playing the piano. He made a concerted effort to engage me in conversation. Asking me about my background, he then proposed that I consider playing the organ for other weekend liturgies in the Church. My reply was that I'd be willing to help if he needed me from time to time, but I didn't want to be known as a "church musician." They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. This is what I looked like back then:



HE said...

She said...

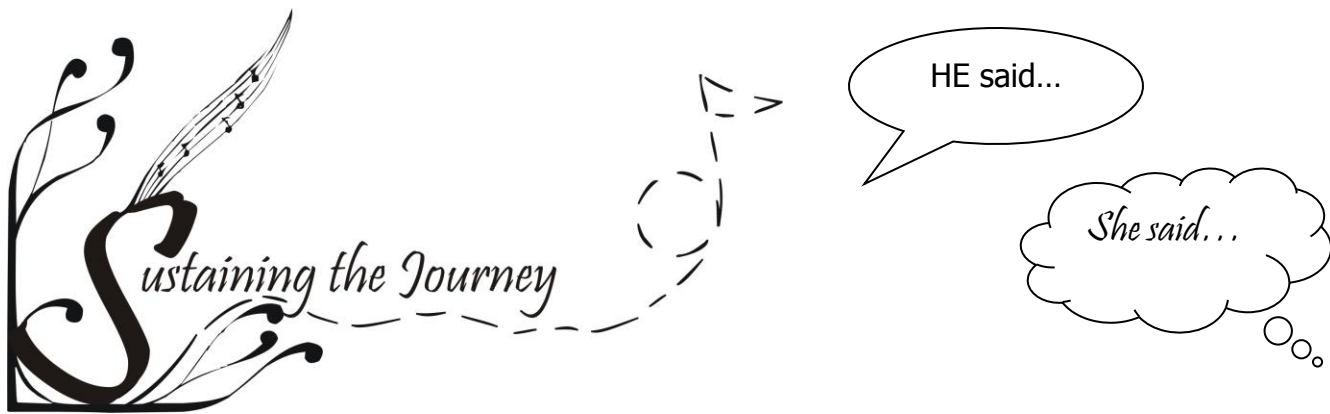
Yep...that's really me!



Within a short span of time, Jim wrangled me into playing the organ at the 7 a.m. Mass on Sunday as well continuing with the 11 a.m. "Gym Mass." At that time, most clubs would have the band start playing at 10 p.m. – so after the Saturday Night Gig, we (the band) would go out to eat. I would then go home, shower, change, and head to the Church (around 4 a.m. or so) and snooze in the parking lot until it was time to go in for Mass. (Usually, one of the priests would knock on my window.) After Mass, Jim would have a snack ready for me at the rectory and then I would go to the "Gym Mass."

Over a period of time, Jim and I became good friends. One day during our morning snack, Jim said that he thought I had a real knack for liturgical music, and with a little schooling could do a fine job in the profession. I told him that I wasn't really interested.

A short time later, Jim informed me that he was going to take a Liturgy class (a refresher for him) at Notre Dame College (S. Euclid) and invited me to join him. He said that the parish would be willing to pay my tuition, and that after class we could go out for a couple beers. Now he had my attention. I took the class with him and did really well. Actually, it was at that point that I was hooked! Jim began to offer more funding to continue paying for classes and he really encouraged me to stay with it.



After a couple years, Jim thought that I had sufficiently grown and prodded me to “spread my wings and leave the nest.” With his guidance, I became the Music Director at another parish, but still helped Jim at his parish when I was able to do so. Jim was very creative and innovative. He really helped to move the parish in a great direction, and laid a lot of groundwork for continued success.

Within a few years Jim became very ill, which forced him to retire. The Pastoral Team of the parish offered me Jim’s position and I ecstatically accepted. On a pretty regular basis, I visited Jim at his home. He would ask me about everything that was going on at the parish, and I would gleefully tell him – as well as ask him for advice. In the course of one of our conversations, I thanked Jim for all he had done for me. I remember his reply almost word for word:

“Someday, you’re going to see some scruffy looking kid in church and recognize his or her talent and ability. Never let that go by the wayside. That’s how you’ll thank me.”

That became my new goal, and I’ve done that many times over the years.

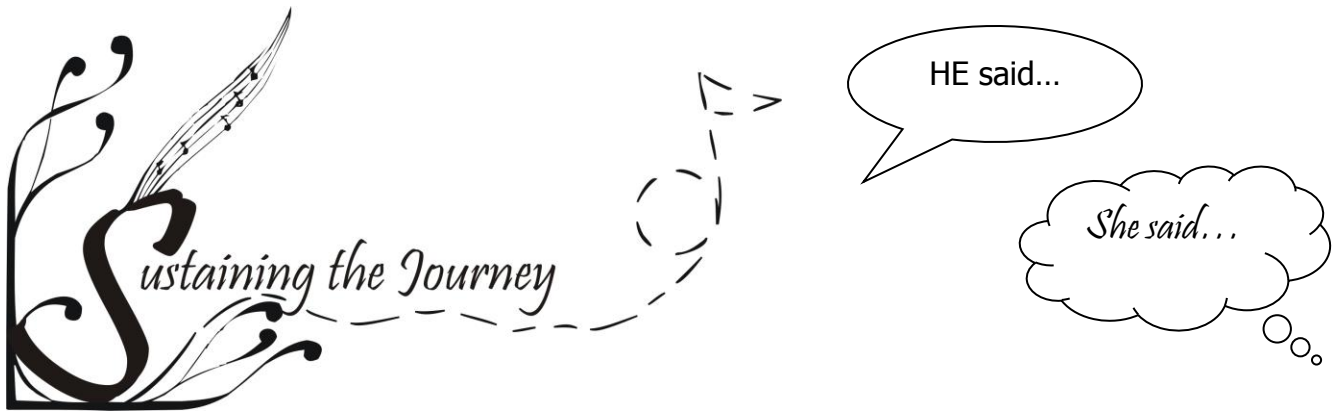
Due to some of Jim’s circumstances with regard to his illness, our visits became shorter and less often – and eventually came to an end. Two or three years after that, I received word that Jim was actively dying. One day while in the office, I picked up his file and perused. It was there I discovered that all of the classes I had taken were not exactly paid for by the parish. Jim actually paid for my classes from his personal education fund (part of his employee benefit.) He believed in my calling (even when I didn’t) and he invested in me! I was really taken aback!

I wanted to communicate with him one last time, but I didn’t think that an in-person meeting would be in his best interest. I decided to write a letter in which I outlined all of the accomplishments that were made at the parish in recent times because of all the groundwork he had laid – and I offered him one last heart-felt thank you. I placed the letter in an envelope (unsealed) and put it in another envelope addressed to Jim’s wife. In a note to her, I asked her to read the letter – and if she thought it would be too much for him, she could throw it away – I didn’t need to know either way.

A day or two later, I heard that Jim died. I went to the wake to pay my respects. While there, Jim’s wife took me aside and asked me for a few minutes of my time. She told me that she gave Jim the letter. She said that as he read it, tears came from his eyes and he smiled (something she had not seen him do in a long time). A few minutes later he went to sleep, and while sleeping, God took him home.

Even in the story of his last moments – he taught me. Very soon after that, I became involved in Diocesan Lay Ecclesial Ministry process and eventually was certified by both the Diocese and Notre Dame College – much because of his inspiration – which added a whole new dimension to my ministry. All of this stemming from the fact that somebody believed in me and took the time to do something about it.

Not a day has gone by that I haven’t been thankful for Jim.



A final thought from Mary:

Our “He Said – She Said” blog is intended to be thought-provoking, and perhaps spur positive action as a result...

I suspect each of us could tell a story – or perhaps many stories – about those who have influenced our lives. Sometimes there are big gestures, but many times the story involves subtle moments that changed our trajectory. Most often, “that person” in your life has left your world better than before you encountered them.

Whether from a perspective of church or organized religion, or simply a mindset of wanting to leave a positive mark, perhaps the most valuable things we do are the ones that make peoples’ lives better. Back to the original challenge, updated:

1. Contemplate who has made a difference in your life.
2. Tell them.
3. Go be “that person” in someone else’s life.