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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.

## We All Have Stuff

*Mary's Perspective*

I've said it many times... in my years of ministry I have learned that we all have stuff. Your stuff may be different from mine, but we all have stuff. Strained relationships, addictions, money concerns, health issues – it's all stuff. We struggle, we benefit from support, we surrender to God's will, and we deal with our stuff.

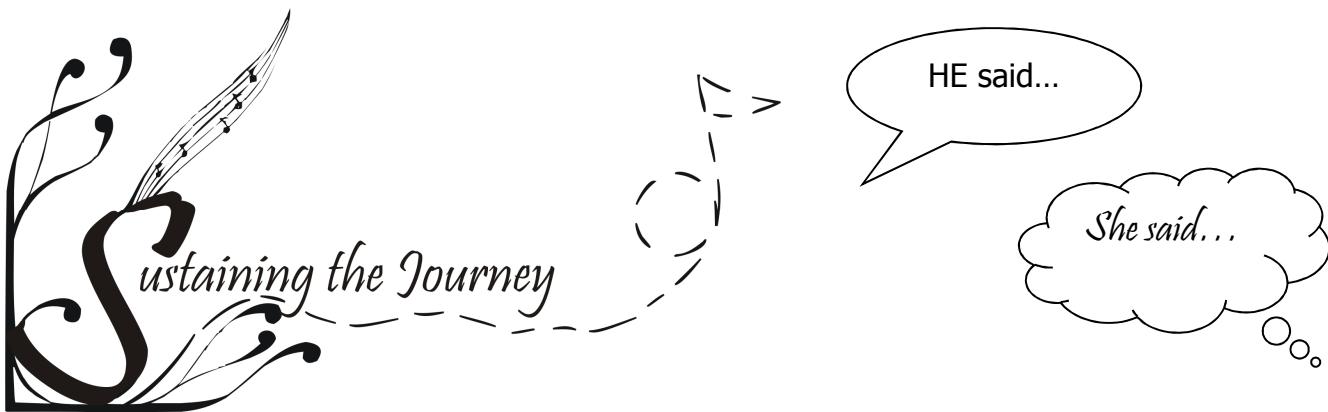
It's also becoming clear to me that we all have the physical kind of stuff. Again, the stuff may be different, but we all deal with it – some of us better than others. You know the stuff – magazines, Cool Whip containers, reusable "to go" trays (no, Bob, those are technically NOT plates), music, clothes, and the like. Some purge regularly and try to contain their stuff. Sometimes the stuff is the containers (how many little Tupperware-like tubs do you *really* need to carry the salad dressing in your lunch sack?).

Bob and I utilize a similar system for managing music. Each member of our respective music ministries has a hymnal and a binder of supplemental music. We generally address the contents of the binders annually, adding and removing pieces that we will need for the next liturgical year or singing season. If there is additional music needed beyond that, we provide courtesy copies – with the instruction to throw the courtesy copy away after use.

Not to call anyone out, but there are members of both of our music ministries who hang on to every last piece of music they can get their hands on. Duplicates? No worries; they punch holes in them and file them alphabetically in yet another binder. When they come to practice, all they need to bring is their binder and hymnal. What they actually bring? Some go so far as to have a rolling suitcase/backpack for all of their perceived "necessities". Some complain that their bag of music (including all the extras) is too heavy. Bob and I are not immune to this. I still have the handouts from ten years worth of NPM conventions. I suspect if you looked in Bob's office, you would find several settings of service music with language prior to the latest revision of the Roman Missal.

Why do we hang on to all of this stuff? We can't use those mass settings anymore. If I received a free octavo and graded it a B- or lower, I'm not going to introduce it to our assembly. Ever. And, honestly, you cantors out there... how many copies do you really need of the psalm for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C? Do you really believe that your music director is going to plan to use a piece and not give you a copy of it? Seriously?

I'm not a resolutions kind of gal, but I do like to evaluate occasionally where I have been and to where I'm going. Perhaps this is the year we might all commit to being more intentional. Make it a point to pare down, de-clutter, and get rid of the "stuff" that takes up mental energy and floor space. Pick a quiet snowy afternoon, turn up some tunes, and have a purge session. Set a time limit so it's not overwhelming, and establish parameters on what you are purging. For example, my daughter is a proponent of hanging all of her clothes in the closet and, as she wears a shirt, turning the hanger the other



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direction on the rack. That way, after six months or a year, she can see what she really has worn and what is just *stuff*. Then she bags the stuff, has a "stuff swap" amongst friends, donates the leftovers, and starts the process again.

I could easily set the parameter of "if a piece of music is a B-/C+ or lower, it goes to the recycle bin." I could limit myself to six food storage containers – and only ones for which I have the matching lids! – or only the magazines from the past two years, or perhaps only clothes that fit my body in the size and shape it is right now. If I miraculously get skinnier, I will treat myself to new jeans (and purge the ones they replace). As I accumulate more to-go containers, I will keep only the six (or pick your number) that are the best. As for music, I am slowly learning to appreciate the value of digital copies – that way, I have favorite pieces stored, but they only take up space on a thumb drive.

You know you have stuff. And you know what your stuff is. Is it taking up valuable space, physically and mentally? Be intentional about clearing the clutter and give yourself the gift of being free from the burden it represents. With less stuff, perhaps we will have more room for the Lord in our lives.

Not a resolution, but how's that for a plan for the new year?

*Bob's Perspective*

Just to clear the air....I have a service setting of 8 "to-go" plates, which function very well by the way. AND I also have matching forks and knives (plastic ware) – very chic I might add. I also have quite a collection of soup containers (with matching lids) – they're great for playing Jenga in the dish drainer!

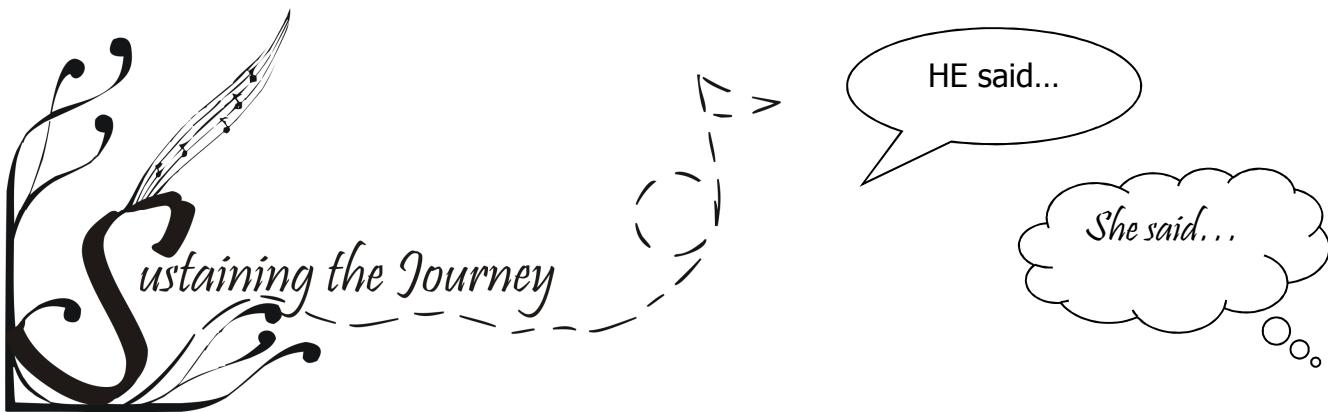
Now then, what were we talking about? Oh yeah...we all have stuff.

Many times we psychologically hang on to "stuff" as well. During the last week of Advent, I was able to experience two Festivals of Praise. One was presented by a group of young adults (at which I was a member of the congregation – at the parish where I'm employed) and the other was presented by Mary and me – along with our good friend, bassist extraordinaire Michael Dragas (at my home parish, where Mary's employed). Both were very moving.

*Note: For those who are unfamiliar, a Festival of Praise involves Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament along with a blend of Contemporary Praise and Worship Music, silent adoration, and Benediction. Sometimes the Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered throughout the service as well.*

Why am I bringing this to the forefront? Here's my story about "stuff":

When Festival of Praise (F.O.P.) was first brought up at my parish, I was very skeptical. I don't mind pushing the limit on some things from time to time, but Eucharistic Devotion in a very conservative and traditional setting has always been one of those things to which I have held on tightly. We had a priest assigned to our parish at that time who was very gung-ho about F.O.P. and had at his disposal a talented group of young people who were willing to help move things forward. When this was presented at a staff meeting, my response (trying to be a team player) was "fine with me as long as I don't have to be involved."



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F.O.P. moved forward without my help or attendance, and all was well. However, some months later, the priest was transferred to another parish and F.O.P. was now without a moderator. Our Pastor then asked me to continue the project. I grudgingly agreed to do it, but in the back of my mind, the project was destined to eventually go on the chopping block. I met several times with the group and oversaw their planning and preparation of the next event. Since I'm not ordained, I asked our parish deacon to preside, and he graciously accepted. My intent was to let the F.O.P. team handle the event while I would sit back and observe the service with a critical eye – hoping to find as much wrong with it as possible.

When the time came, I assisted the group with their needs: opening the church, setting up equipment, distributing worship aids and so forth. I then took my place in the back of the church, watched and listened.

The music was great and the service was well done – and well in line with the Church's Rite. What I didn't expect was twofold:

1. I saw a group of young people – many of whom I hadn't seen in our church in a long time. They were reverent and visibly moved by the service. I watched them as they prayed intently. I watched them as they went in and out of the confessionals. I watched them as they knelt before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament – praying their penance. I watched as they interacted with each other after the service.
  
2. I was absolutely moved by the whole thing.

The only regret I had at that point was that I had only been passively supportive at best. It was one of those times that I let my baggage (my stuff) get in the way. I felt terrible – and actually apologized to them at a meeting a few weeks later. After that, I took on a whole new role of support.

*Note: In case you're wondering, NOOOOO...I wasn't visited by three ghosts, nor have I recently read or seen any versions of Dickens' Christmas Carol!!!*

The group has since evolved into its own active ministry, involving people from all over our diocese. A few of them have been exploring religious life, one is well along his way in the seminary, one has been working with me as an assistant music director, and one just became a full-time music director at another parish. I'm happy to say that they still come back to our parish from time to time to join in celebrating seasonal events and Festivals of Praise.

We all have stuff.....