

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.

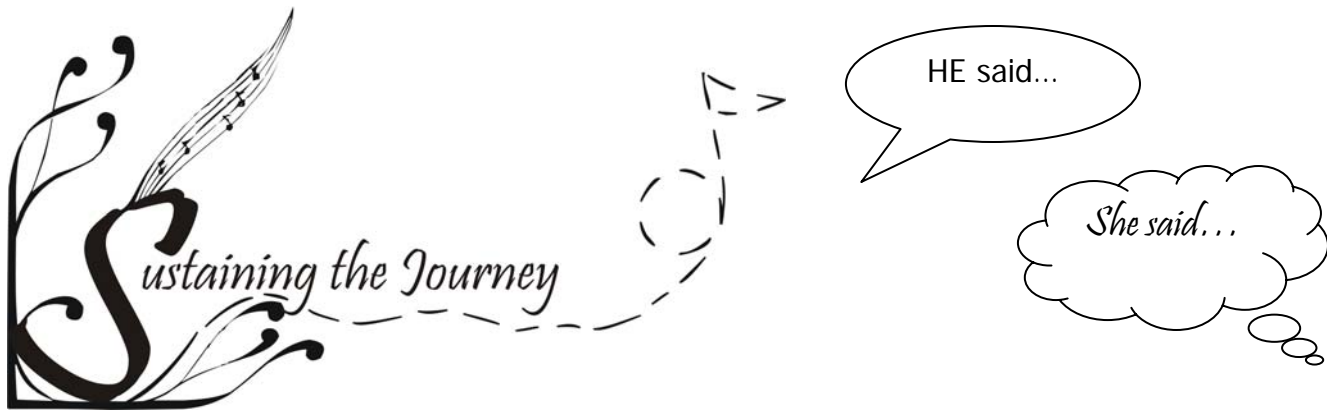
Weddings

Mary's perspective:

Weddings present both opportunity and challenge... Certainly, there are couples who enter the process with a definite set of pre-conceived ideas that may or may not be in keeping with our faith tradition and the norms of good liturgy. However, wedding preparation can be a time of gentle evangelization and an opportunity to have a big impact on the couple's (and family's) sense of connection with the parish.

To connect with the couples, address expectations, perhaps head-off the preconceptions, and make the "church part" of wedding planning a positive experience, I find it helpful to invest some time. First, I make it a point to attend part of the Pre-Cana day. I help start the day off with prayer, including music. (When I offered to the Pre-Cana Team to play morning prayer, they were grateful for the support and more than willing to give me some time after it to talk to the couples.) Then I take just a few minutes to introduce myself, to explain the planning process, and to address some of the biggest issues (for example, we use only liturgical music at weddings, and just because the church has a music director does NOT mean you have booked that person to play your wedding - you need to ask the ministers who will play your wedding!)

I also offer Wedding Music Planning Sessions. I typically host these sessions 2-3 times per year, depending on how the various wedding dates lay out on the calendar. Each session contains the same content, and I invite couples to come to the one that best fits their situation. At the Wedding Music Planning Session, I address the details of the church part... order of worship, sacrament and sacredness, scripture, who to ask to participate in special roles (i.e., readers and gift-bearers), music, worship aids, what to bring and who to invite to the rehearsal, etc. I play through snippets of music and provide lots of sample wedding programs. I even hand out forms for the couples to fill in, so that one of the results of this night is multiple couples complete their wedding plans. In the long run, it saves me time to do this as a group, and couples appreciate the opportunity to meet others



who are preparing for marriage - we have even facilitated couples sharing the cost of flowers because they were getting married the same day and were able to make the connection at a planning session.

I keep the planning sessions to about an hour but make sure I address all the questions that arise. We give the couples a chance to walk around and see, for example, where the bridal party will get ready the day of the wedding. The evening is informal yet informative, and I'm able to share my experiences both as music minister and as a married woman. Between the Pre-Cana and the Wedding Planning Session, and answering the inevitable questions that arise after the planning session, I have had multiple experiences with the couple and prayed with them before their wedding day. It makes a difference in the quality of the celebration and their experience as a whole.

Never underestimate the positive impact that can have! Often couples are young and they talk to their family and other young couples about their experience with the church...by investing some time up front, we as ministers have the wonderful opportunity to welcome (or welcome back) those who might not otherwise have a church home.

Bob's Perspective – actually more of a testimonial:

It is of the utmost importance to be patient and understanding when working with couples, while at the same time helping them to create a wedding celebration that truly encompasses the meaning of Covenant between God and his people. This can be a rather difficult concept to deal with based on the seemingly wide gap between social standards and the Church – and in my opinion takes a unique minister to make this celebration truly successful.

This is not to be judgmental. Rather, it is understanding my own gifts and shortcomings – and doing what's best for the people of God. To that end, I rarely take on a ministerial role for weddings. I learned this tenant early on: a good Director doesn't have to be the best at everything in his/her area, but only the best at providing for everything. I've known Mary for quite some time, and have observed her wedding practices on numerous occasions. When it comes to patience and gentility, she's got me on this one hands down! Because of that, I asked Mary to provide the same wedding ministry at my parish as at her own, and she has done so splendidly for years.