



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.

Caring for the Care Providers

Mary's perspective:

"People don't care what you know until they know that you care." A dear friend of ours, Fr. Stephen Kaminski, said that a lot - and he lived by that tenet. As Bob and I spent the last week preparing for, and celebrating, Stephen's final journey home, we have reflected a lot on this concept. Stephen touched thousands of lives, as evidenced by the throngs of people that came to the hospital, and Vespers, and wake, and funeral, and luncheon. Folks knew that Stephen cared. He was a man of certain faith, and he loved to share what he knew. Stephen was, in some ways, bigger than life. Gregarious, with a twinkle in his eye and a laugh that could be heard counties away, he often described himself as "fat, bald, and over 50". But whether times were filled with struggle or celebration, Stephen cared.

In our reflections, we have observed that part of what makes Pope Francis so beloved is that he cares, too. Eschewing the formalities and structure, Pope Francis has encouraged us to be with one another at all walks of life. And isn't that what ministry is all about? Heck, isn't that what our baptismal call truly is all about? Caring for others, no matter the circumstances...

When we started Sustaining the Journey, we had this notion that we need to provide support for ministers. We weren't exactly sure what that support would look like, nor where the road would lead, but we figured if we just started walking, God would direct the path. We're still walking, and being guided. Initially, we offered workshops. Our thought was to offer a meal or a snack - as Bob says, it's amazing what people will sit through if you feed them! - and our tagline became "Come for the food, stay for the nourishment."

Our ministry has grown over the years to include a website and blog and we are developing some print materials. And although we still strongly believe in feeding folks and being nourished (literally and spiritually), we have been so inspired by this concept of caring for others that we have updated our tagline.

I recently did a talk where I described the challenge of changing peoples' mindset: What if "the goal" of being at church on the weekend is to transform folks from being butts in the pew to being ministers? What if we saw our baptismal call as truly priest, prophet, and king, and we took seriously that call? If each of us looked to serve others in our daily lives - whether in a church setting, or in secular living - and we saw ourselves as living the lives of ministers, then the weekend worship becomes a gathering of like-minds who get energized and renewed and refreshed and restored by Eucharist and the fellowship of that celebration, to go out for another week and continue to serve. We are no longer fulfilling an



obligation (check that off the list - next step, breakfast, then clean the house...). We are encouraging each other and being nourished in our care for, and with, each other. How's that for a new concept of church?

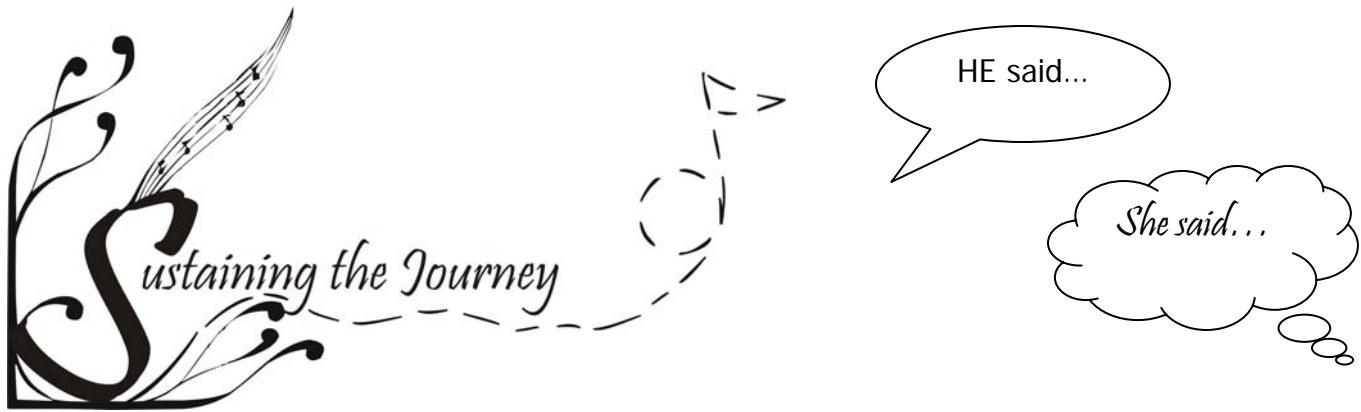
"Caring for the care providers" reaches so much farther than just those who have a formal ministerial role in the church. It is my hope that we all recognize our role as care provider - as parents, as co-workers, as friends, and yes also as church ministers. We all need to be fed and nourished. We all are infused with the Spirit who guides us on the path of our ministry. We are all challenged to let others know that we care, long before we try to share what we know.

Inspired by Fr. Stephen, and by Pope Francis, and by over a thousand people who came this week to pay their respects to a man whose life on this earth seemed way too short, it is our hope that something as subtle as a new tagline may in turn inspire you to re-vision your calling. May we always do our best to care for others. May we recognize our unique calling as care providers - as ministers - as Christians - and may we live up to that calling.

Bob's perspective:

"People don't care what you know until they know that you care." Fr. Stephen was the Pastor of my home parish, St. Mary Magdalene Church, where I had served for nearly 15 years. The first time I met him was when he came to my house about a year ago to visit my wife, Maureen who was terminally ill. Because Maureen had been away from the Church for quite some time (over 20 years) and I work at a different parish, I didn't expect the attentiveness or impact that he made in our lives. Maureen asked that he come over just to talk. Rather than spouting theological principles and tenants, he just listened and in the most caring way I've ever witnessed, he just invited Maureen back - I wasn't at all sure she was interested in that prospect. I left the room at that point so they could speak privately. From downstairs, (although I was trying not to hear anything) there was the sound of hushed voices and his wonderful, infectious laugh. A little over 2 hours passed when I heard Fr. Stephen call me to come upstairs. He said in a hushed voice, "I anointed her...would you like to receive Communion as well?" I was absolutely floored.

St. Mary Magdalene is a fairly large parish, and Fr. Stephen was the only priest assigned there. I didn't expect to see him again in that capacity, but on his own he came called and came over again. When Maureen was finally moved to the hospice center he visited several times. At one point, Maureen was semi-comatose, but he just took his time and sat and chatted with me. I told him how grateful we were for his help and just for being there. "I don't know how you do it," I said. He replied, "People don't care what you know until they know that you care." About a week later, he drove 30 miles to concelebrate Maureen's funeral at St. Monica Church. Admittedly, as grateful as I was at the time, I only heard him with one ear.



Our paths crossed a number of times after that – and I was able to book him to give a Lenten Parish Mission at St. Monica's. About 10 days before the Mission was to take place, he was rushed into the hospital and diagnosed. Although we texted a couple times, we never had the chance to speak to each other again.

Over the period of the three weeks leading to his final journey home, I personally felt empty because there was to be no opportunity to reciprocate – that is, until Mary offered me the chance to participate in Vespers and Fr. Stephen's funeral. And it wasn't even in the participation so much, but in the chance to minister to so many of my fellow parishioners in their grief – to listen to their stories and to just care.

There is a great lesson for us (me especially) in all of this – something that I hope to carry on with through my ministry in the Church and in Sustaining the Journey - "People don't care what you know until they know that you care."