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.

## Scheduling Ministers

Mary's perspective:

In my 30+ years of liturgical ministry, I have observed, or been responsible for, a variety of approaches to scheduling volunteer ministers. Using everything from a weekly assignment sheet on the bulletin board, to an elaborate Excel spreadsheet covering multiple months, my current favorite is a software package called Ministry Scheduler Pro (see www.Rotundasoftware.com).

NOTE : This is not a sales pitch, it simply reflects our opinions!

I determine scheduling blocks for the entire year. Generally, I find folks only book their calendars 7-10 weeks in advance, so I try to keep my schedule blocks in that range, taking into consideration the liturgical seasons and events in the church (and, quite frankly, my life!) For example, I learned the hard way that I definitely do not want to be creating a liturgical minister schedule the week before Holy Week.

Ministry Scheduler Pro (MSP) automates the system. It enables volunteers to enter availability constraints, send and respond to sub requests, receive email reminders when they are scheduled, and provides a means for me to send group emails conveniently to the ministers. Once the schedule is created, it is easy to access in the cloud or via app and much of what used to involve a series of phone calls or emails is now handled automatically. Our ministers appreciate that it considers their needs, and I (as administrator) value the convenience (not to mention the "Commence Scheduling" button that fills in all the open slots with available ministers!).

For those ministers who do not have internet access (about 15 out of 180), I use MSP to export the schedule and I provide printed copies. However, I'm printing way fewer copies so MSP has saved not only my time but also a few trees.
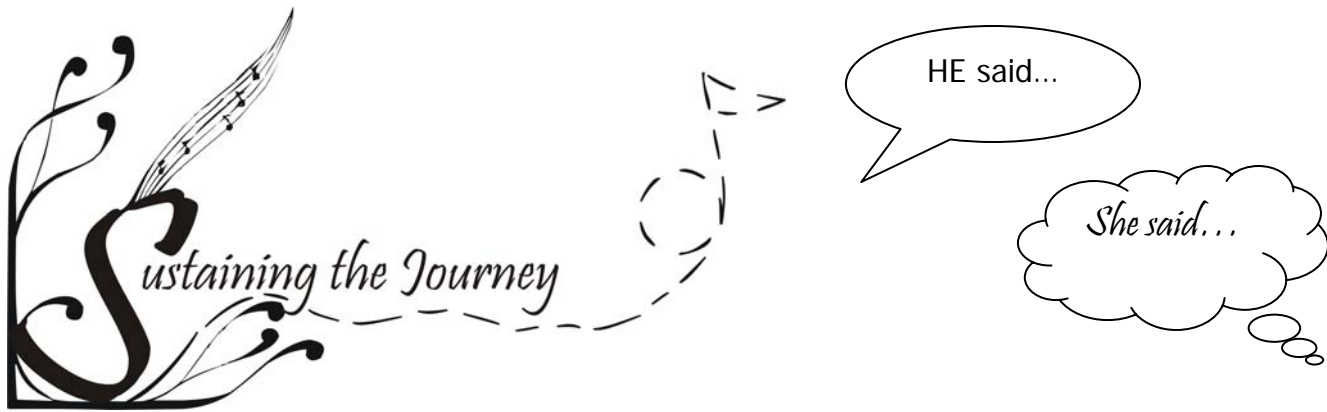
Bob's Perspective:

Many of the ministers in our parish are older adults who either don't have email addresses or don't want to share them. Because of this, we have found that providing "hard copies" (with sincere apologies to ecologists)seems to be the most effective way of circulating schedules. With the exception of the members of our Music Ministry (which are scheduled on a yearly basis) our liturgical ministers are scheduled quarterly.

For the quarterly scheduling we use Ministry Scheduler from ACS Technologies. The scheduler can be synchronized with the Parish Data Systems census program (also from ACS), so when a parishioner has changes in their information (address, phone number, etc.), the scheduler is updated as well.

The best feature of this product (in my opinion) is that you can "tag" people together so that families and loved ones can serve at the same liturgy. For example, it's not uncommon to have one parent as a Lector, another as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and the children as Altar Servers. The downside of that however, is that if the car breaks down (or some other family disaster occurs) you lose a significant number of ministers for that particular liturgy.

Another feature is that you can "flag" ministers so they aren't scheduled when on vacation of if their work schedule changes.

The difficulty with all of this, however, is to develop a sense of ministry rather than volunteerism among the ministers. That is, creating a sense that these ministries aren't just an extracurricular activity, but rather a true calling to serve the people of God in their endeavor to give thanks and praise in a meaningful way. We'll be addressing this topic down the line.