

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.

Incorporating New Blood

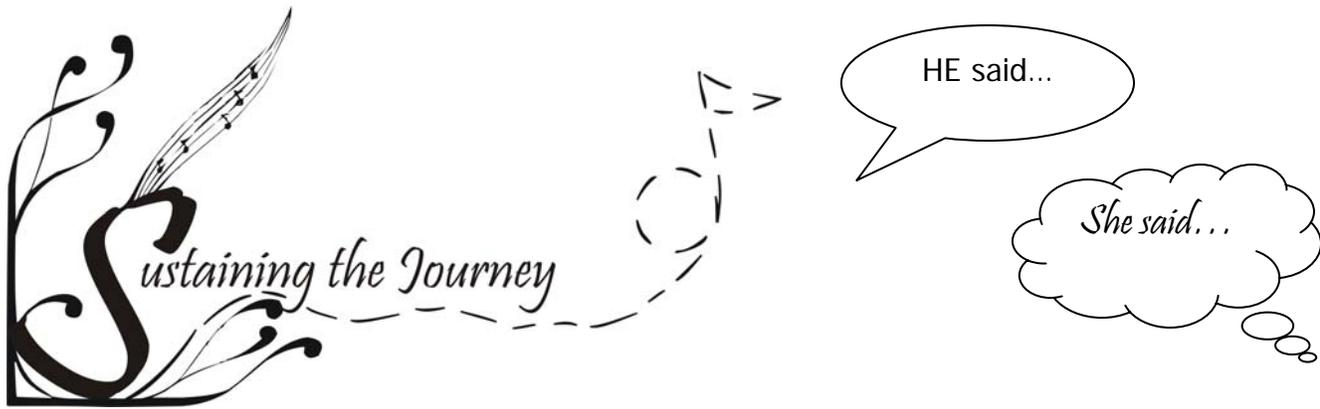
Mary's perspective:

When Bob and I first talked about blog topics, we reflected on how our ministry groups ebb and flow in size and makeup. At the time, my music group was on an upswing - we had six new members join in the past year. It would have been easy to rest on my laurels and say that growing is no problem when you're doing the right stuff...however, even when you have all the pieces in place, sometimes membership dwindles a bit. (Of those six, only two stayed on through the season.) One of the most challenging factors of working with volunteers is that you can't change another person's priorities. They will choose what they want to do, despite what you may think is a better plan. As ministry leaders, all we can do is make the situation the most conducive to participation, and trust the Spirit to put the pieces in place.

Sidebar - ever notice there is a continuing theme to my reflections on surrendering "control"?

However, just because we can't make people think the way we do, does not absolve us from doing our very best to encourage all the faithful to grow from butt in the pew to minister. I've read a number of books and articles that challenge us to see the weekend liturgy as the opportunity to gather all the ministers to celebrate, invigorate, give praise to God, and then mission back out for the next week. Our baptismal call compels us to more than simply putting in our hour a week. So the question becomes... how do we serve with such passion, such grace, such enthusiasm, such a love of the Lord that the attitude of ministry is contagious? Impossible to ignore? That people see in us something so unique, so desirable, so undeniable, that they want to learn more?

It's more than simply hosting a ministry fair or a pizza party to encourage new members - it's a whole mindset. And when we start to truly live what we believe, others are drawn to us. To faith. To calling. To ministry.



Now I know we are each a work in process, and sometimes that process is a crooked road. So while we are working on our own faith journey, how can we encourage others on theirs? Some things are pretty basic... be accessible. Stick around after mass in case someone wants to start a conversation. Get to know the folks with whom you pray. Regularly invite the assembly to join various ministries. In bulletin notes, emails, announcements at mass, flyers on a bulletin board, be inviting and welcoming. Pave the path to make it easier to minister. Make introductions. Show your joy while you minister! And yes, ministry fairs and pizza parties have their place in the scheme. Some folks are drawn to social opportunities, so cultivate those.

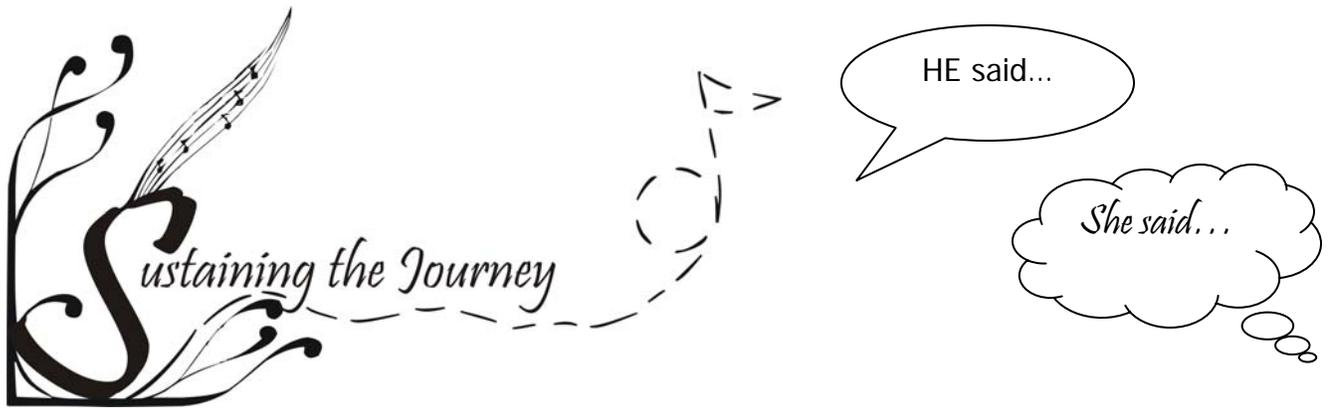
Once you have a volunteer interested, be consistent. Get them connected, regularly check in to see how things are going, and keep communication open. Make sure they have the supplies or resources they need to be successful. With new musicians, we find it's best to just jump in and start playing. Doesn't matter if you can only play a couple of songs the first few times... things will grow from there. Most importantly, help them take ownership of their ministry. Expect responsibility and encourage input (then use it!). Treat others as you'd like to be treated.

Many of us are blessed to have had a mentor or two in life who showed us the ropes. Think back to your own experience, and build on what worked. Learn from your mistakes. It really is pretty basic stuff, but sometimes we need to get back to the basics.

Living what we believe. Trusting that we have the right skills and the right situation to make a positive impact. And serving with joy. Basic stuff. Building blocks. Oh, and don't forget the pizza - Bob and I learned a long time ago that if you feed them, they will come!

Bob's Perspective:

Mary's take on this topic is right on the mark! What I'd like to add has more to do with keeping ourselves in a consistent, stable and positive mindset – whether we're experiencing an ebb or a flow in attendance. The way we project ourselves and our attitudes correlates to how attractive the ministry is to prospective new members. This is not only true for those in charge, but for those in the ranks as well. When the group is present at Mass or at an event, do they appear to be happy and mindful of the task at hand, or is this just one more activity to check off the to-do list? Where



possible, do they take the time before or after Mass to greet people enthusiastically? When they receive a compliment, do they corral all of the praise to themselves, or do they point to the accomplishment of the group? Are they inviting in nature, or do they portray an attitude of exclusivity? Many times prospective members are right under our noses and just need to be asked.

Society has changed much since the 1990's. Long term commitments are not easy to come by, nor are they easy to make for most of us. Are there ministerial opportunities for people who have a limited amount of time to commit, or is the ministry an "all or nothing" deal? Having a large choir that sings regularly at a particular Mass time is a commendable goal. However, I'm not so sure that in many cases it's a reasonable, attainable or manageable goal.

I'm reminded of the old story of the oak tree and the willow. Both trees were roughly the same age, but the oak tree was big and steadfast while the willow was smaller and less massive. One day a great wind storm came through. When it was over, the oak tree was laying on the ground while the willow still stood. As the trees had aged, the oak tree was no longer strong enough to endure by sheer strength while the willow remained flexible.