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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.

## Weddings

### *Mary's perspective:*

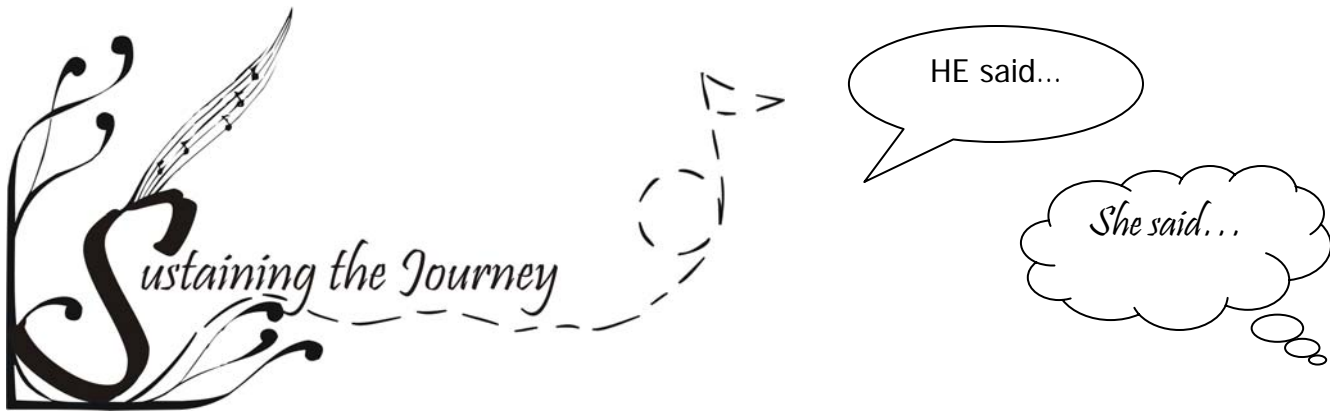
When Bob and I talked about blog topics and this came up, I seriously considered just ignoring it completely. There are many angles to address, and frankly I have played the lion's share of weddings at Bob's church for the past 20 years - trust me, it's better that way for Bob and the nuptial couples. Weddings have changed drastically, even in just the past few years. Every musician has a happy story, a horror story, or likely multiple wedding stories that sometimes are best saved for an evening at the local watering hole with plenty of libations... However, when it comes to a liturgical musician's employment, weddings are a reality and handling them well is not just a necessity for sanity, but a true opportunity for evangelization.

First, some nuts and bolts... Logistically, if one plays a lot of weddings in the course of a "season", it makes sense to be as efficient as possible. That's why several years ago I established Wedding Liturgy Planning Sessions. I choose dates based on how the year's weddings fall in the calendar. Some years I have hosted as many as four sessions - this year I am only planning one. I invite all engaged couples to attend the session most convenient to them. I provide a form for them to complete. We go through all parts of the liturgy, and they fill in their choices. It's a nice opportunity to address the sanctity of the sacrament, why we do what we do, and to answer any church-related questions. I provide samples of worship aids, debunk myths (no, the visit to Mary's altar is NOT part of the Rite of Marriage), talk about what to bring to the rehearsal, etc. Having been married for 27 years, and playing weddings for more than that, I bring a unique perspective that couples find valuable.

I mentioned this is an opportunity for evangelization. Truly it is. Many times couples marrying in the church - or their close relative - have a story of heartache or inaccurate notions about liturgy or the church in general. Weddings are a happy occasion and a chance to leave a positive impression, especially on families that may be returning after having been away for a while. (For the record, funerals are also a wonderful evangelization opportunity, but we won't blur those lines here.)

In the last few years, the USCCB (Conference of Catholic Bishops) updated the Rite of Marriage. This has provided a nice conversation starter for the clergy with whom I minister. Communication is a good thing, and it has given us a reason to come together on "how we do weddings". All of these are my typical "glass half full" perspective of weddings.

However, the elephant in the room is that weddings can be a pain in the patootie! Everyone has an opinion. Television programs encourage "bridezillas", and local merchants have encouraged customs that are not part of the Rite (such as the Unity Candle or Unity Cross, or Sand Ritual - hello? The unending circle of the wedding ring is your sign of unity?) Way fewer couples are choosing to get married in church, so presiding clergy have less repetition - which means each wedding poses a new opportunity to remember together how the ritual goes. (Read: an opportunity to inadvertently miss, skip, or reorder parts.) Many couples come into the process with pre-conceived ideas of what they want, without



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any understanding of the liturgical ritual - and then get mad when Father or the liturgist vetoes their plan to have Aunt Sadie sing *Hallelujah* from *Shrek* as the gospel acclamation. (Look up the lyrics - it's about the wedding night, and I'm not referring to the reception!)

**So how do we make weddings less frustrating for the ministers, and more *sacred/appropriate/evangelizing/pick your word?***

Again, if I had the answers, I wouldn't be jealous of the fact that Bob has managed to avoid playing weddings for two decades! However, I do think part of the answer lies not just in how we approach working with engaged couples, but how we minister to folks long before the engagement ring is given. If regular liturgical ministry - Sunday Mass, retreats, worship opportunities, etc. - is effective, folks already understand the concept of sacrament and good liturgy. If we are welcoming, in environment, through each other, in the music selections and through dynamic preaching, families may already be more connected to their faith. If we include a focus on good liturgy in the formation of our children, perhaps as they become of marrying age they will already have an appreciation and desire for good wedding liturgy. There's no question that, as a liturgist and musician, the best weddings are those of couples who are already active and involved in parish life.

To paraphrase our blog on [Financial Survival of the Church](#), perhaps if we feed them, they will come.

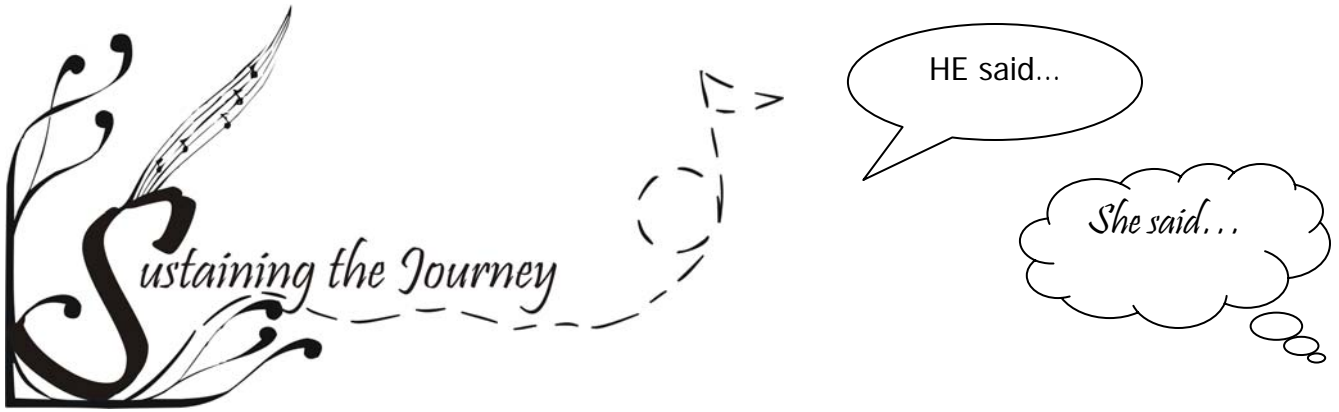
*Bob's perspective:*

As Mary indicated, I am not usually involved with catechizing, preparing couples or executing music at the Rite of Marriage. In the last 19 years, I have been involved with exactly 3 weddings. I'm not at all opposed to the Sacrament of Marriage or to the idea of preparing couples well. As a matter of fact, the opposite is quite true.

The celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage is not the Bride or Groom's "Special Day." Nor is it a time to "perform" or "show off" our instrumental or vocal abilities - or those of Cousin Elmer or Aunt Zelda. Nor is it a time to play selections from the "Sentimental Hit Parade," because that's what they did at Great Granny Santini's wedding back in the summer of ought 3. It's not a time for a fashion show production - or for a Las Vegas Review. Rather, it's a time in which a Bride and a Groom pledge their love and commitment to each other and seals that in a covenant between themselves in the presence our Lord and his Church - and in that all should find the greatest of joy.

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church has developed and handed down the Rite which (as ministers of the Church) we are bound to prepare and execute in a faithful manner. I find it both aggravating and frustrating to attend weddings and experience the triteness that is allowed to masquerade for such a Rite.

It's difficult to blame couples who experience such events and then come to us and want the same thing. Much of the time, it is our fault for not providing adequate catechesis and example to those for whom we are responsible. It's tough to teach them when exceptions are constantly made by musicians and clergy alike through laziness, ignorance or because we just don't want to deal with controversy. (i.e. let them take roses to their mothers and sing, 'Sunrise, Sunset' at the sign of peace, so as not to have any unpleasant encounters with Bridezilla or her mother.)



The Liturgy is not ours, or theirs, or that of the priest. The Liturgy belongs to the Church. It is not ours, theirs, or the priest's with which to tamper by creating and adding trite rituals to its content, and it is certainly is not ours to omit that which the Church, in her wisdom, expects us to provide.

My Father used to say, "Either do it right, or don't do it at all." His words echo in my mind whenever I choose to be part of any endeavor. In the last 19 years, I've been involved in 3 weddings and they were all done well and right.