

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.

Mentoring the Next Generation

Mary's perspective:

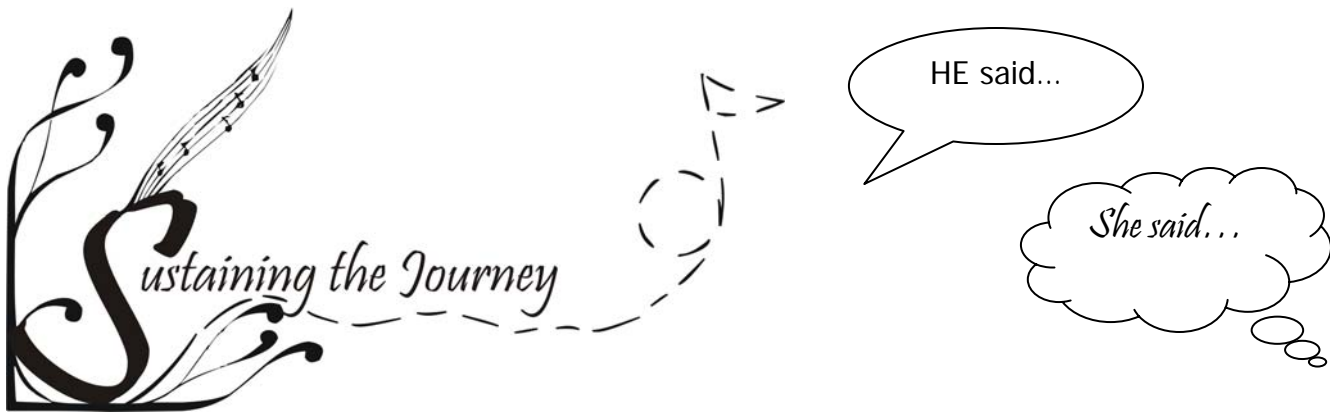
Think back to how you first got started in ministry... was there someone who showed you the ropes? Either gently guiding or outright instructing, mentors are invaluable in our formation. Whether in ministry or a business endeavor, a good mentor can be the difference between being very successful and being frustrated enough to give up.

When my husband and I took on a franchise of a multi-million dollar company, we were very impressed by the company's commitment to mentoring its new owners. They paired successful owners with the "new kids on the block", intentionally set times for meetings, and even structured some goals to encourage success. We learned from their wisdom and experience.

In ministry, especially when working with volunteers, mentoring provides an invaluable connection between the minister and the organization. If a new guitarist wants to join the music ministry, he/she is much more likely to return and grow if someone welcomes them and helps them acclimate to the group. It doesn't matter if that guitarist is only familiar with a few chords and can't support the music on their own in the beginning. The personal connection, the feeling of being part of a bigger picture, and contributing to the ministry feeds the guitarist enough to keep him/her coming back and ultimately growing into a stronger minister. Those major seventh and diminished chords will come, eventually.

I often find myself looking around the church (both literally and figuratively) and cannot help but notice...we are not getting any younger! It's one thing for the "old-timers" and the "pillars of the church" to say we need more young people to get involved. The step from observing the need to actually encouraging the next generation can seem monumental. I believe an intentional mentoring plan can make that step a little more manageable.

How do you welcome new members into your ministry? How do you maintain the connection, encourage their interest and make sure they come back next week?



One of the things I have always admired about Bob is his ability to see the unique skills that each person has, and to build on those with ministry-specific tasks. He also has an effusive philosophy of "grab a part and hang on!" In music ministry, singing is fun! It's okay if you don't always catch that harmony line; if you don't know it, then sing melody. If you're the new keyboardist and you can't play all of the music for mass, concentrate on what you CAN play, and PLAY IT.

For example, I have several members of our music ministry who play piano or keyboard to some extent. Rather than overwhelm them, I try to make opportunities for them to use their skills and grow in their ministry. Often this means we play together - one of us on piano and one on keyboard. It is much less scary to play an instrument when you can trust that the music will continue even if you get tangled up. Other times, if they have mastered a piece, they will accompany the cantor or choir for that piece (again, less daunting than playing the entire mass). If you work with ensembles, the mentoring process often takes shape naturally, with the more senior members bringing along the "newbies". This doesn't just apply to music - I have experienced the buddy system in many settings, from the lunch packing veteran driving the new member to the group meeting, to the senior lector offering observations to the newest lector.

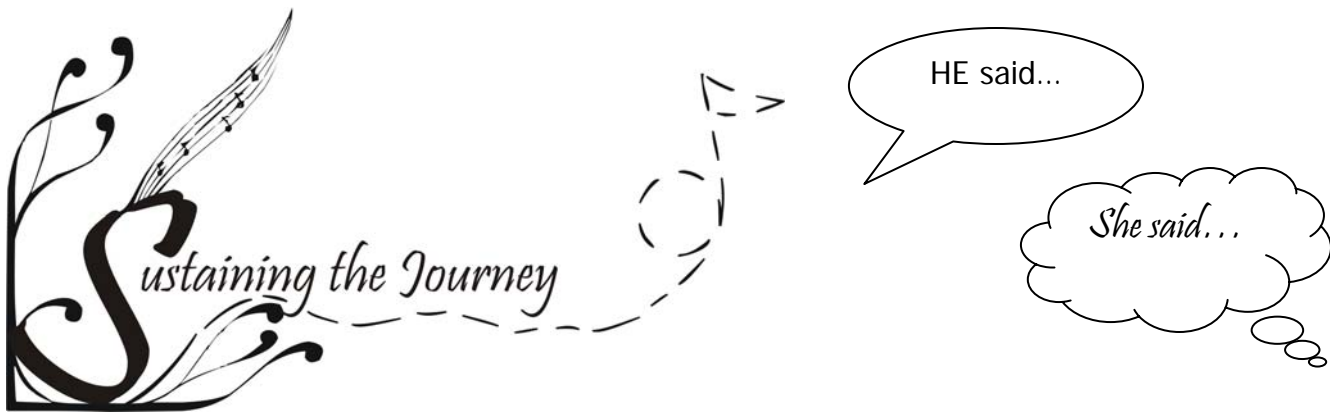
Within your own setting, how do you seek the next generation? Are you inviting and welcoming, or more of a closed clique? Is input welcome, valued, and used? Or is there more of a patronizing attitude? When a new member has joined, how do you keep them connected? Who is responsible for checking in with them, addressing concerns proactively, and encouraging them?

As with any endeavor, a little planning goes a long way to develop happy and whole ministries!

Bob's Perspective:

I agree wholeheartedly with Mary (especially the part where she compliments me! Just kidding!) What I would like to add to Mary's prospective remarks are the components of responsibility and ownership.

It is essential to instill a sense of responsibility into those whom we mentor. *Whatever can be done well, must done well.* This is important because it takes away the "doing it to just to feel good" syndrome. It develops an attitude that what they are trying to accomplish affects the community as a whole. This gives them a sense of the importance of striving and growing. For example, if someone is unable to carry a sung harmony part alone, it's often better for that person to sing in unison with



the others (and encourage them to keep trying), rather than “winging it” and hoping for the best (which doesn’t usually work).

A poor (or unprepared) attempt often causes discouragement, embarrassment, and leads to damaging self-confidence. Part of the mentor’s responsibility (in general terms and conditions) is to set that individual up for success. A tiny victory is better than a huge defeat – and conversely generates the opposite outcome of the poor attempt. Admittedly, this can take bit of work (simplifying musical parts, additional practice time, giving a few lessons) in order to help the individual along. The upside is what this does for them as individuals - and what building on their gift does for the community.

The other component that I mentioned before is ownership. This one takes a little more finesse – and humility. At our parish, we are very blessed to have a group of older high school and college students that make up our Festival of Praise Team. A few of them originally approached us about having a Festival of Praise every so often as one of our parish worship experiences. I have to admit that I wasn’t tremendously enthused about the idea. In our neck of the woods this was new territory and I perceived this as a flash in the pan. That being said, we agreed to form a team and try it a few times (nothing ventured, nothing gained). In a very short time, their strong devotion and commitment was apparent. At that point, I told them that if this was to continue, they would need to step up to the plate and take ownership. Through a number of formational activities and meetings, they eventually came to the point of being able to prepare and rehearse these events with a minimal amount of supervision – and the dimension they add to our Parish is invaluable! The finesse was in guiding them to ownership. The humility was in admitting to them that they changed my way of thinking and I was deeply moved by their witness and work.