

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.

New Year...New Resources?

Mary's perspective:

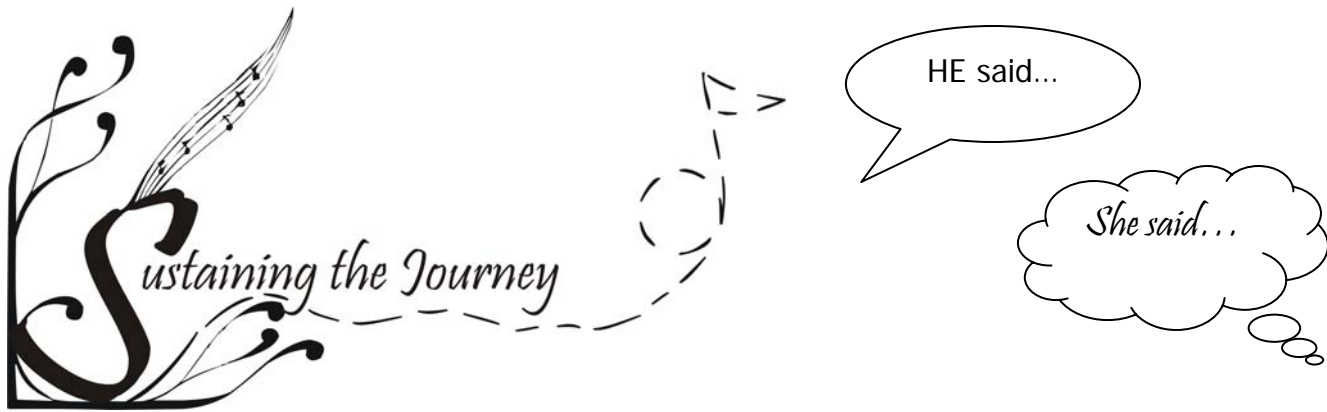
As we start a new calendar, many take time to evaluate the past year and make some plans - perhaps even resolutions - for the coming year. If your coming year includes introducing new music resources, we have some thoughts to share!

When it comes to introducing individual pieces of music into a parish repertoire, less is more. As music ministers, we sing the same music over and over, through multiple practices and often multiple services per weekend. Our assembly does not. They have one chance to learn a new piece. IF you use it a few weeks in a row (which we recommend), they hear it the first time, wait a week before they hear it again, and wait another week to try and sing along. By the time we (and our choirs) are sick of a piece of music, the assembly may just be starting to get the melody!

Given our role of supporting the assembly's full, active, and conscious participation, new music should be introduced sparingly and repeated frequently. I have found that, at most, our assembly can learn about five new pieces of hymnody per year. (I don't necessarily include psalms in this plan.) Therefore, if we are going to only introduce at most five pieces of music this year, they need to be very good, and I need to consider what five pieces are our least effective, to be replaced. We have lots of experience on best practices for introducing new pieces - but that's fodder for another blog...

What if the new resource you want to introduce is a hymnal? Bob and I have both recently purchased new hymnals for our parishes. Although the end result was the same - updated music books - we took quite different approaches. Both were effective, but tailored to the needs of each of our parishes. In a nutshell, here's the road I took:

No matter what hymnal we chose, I knew that we wanted to finance the purchase in full prior to actually buying them. Our plan was to offer the opportunity for folks to make a donation and memorialize a book with a placard in memory of a deceased loved one (or in honor of a living loved one). Because of this, the timing was critical. I wanted to be considerate of how much we had



been asking of our assembly. Actually, in our situation, when I was close to introducing the plan to our assembly, the church air conditioning unit suddenly kicked up its heels. Our pastor prioritized an A/C fundraiser over hymnals, and conducted a successful campaign. I determined to wait at least six months before asking for financial support for another project.

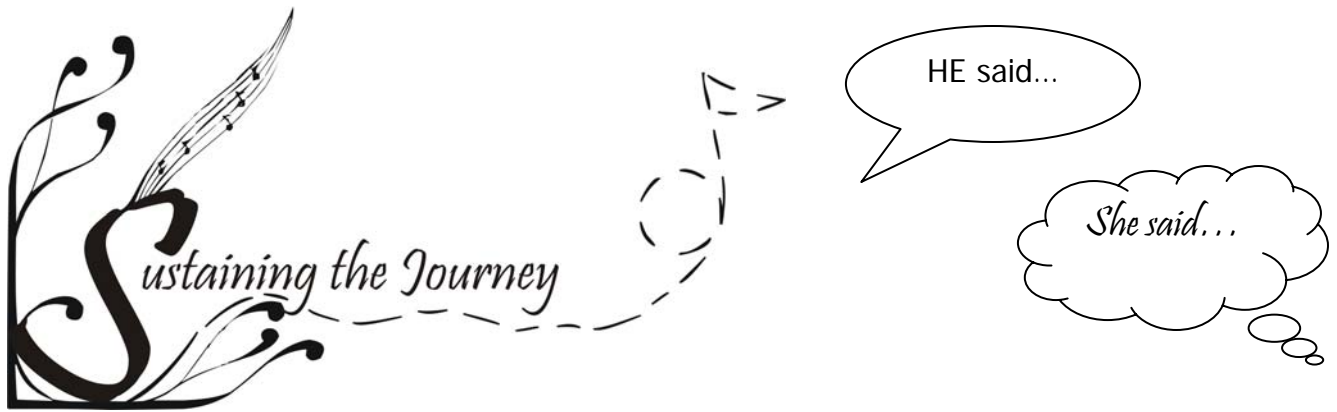
Another piece of the puzzle is deciding what resource to purchase. There are many fine options available, both subscriptions and permanent hymnals. In my current parish, continuity was important to me, so I actually compared a year's worth of liturgy plans to the contents of my top three contenders. I ended up choosing the one that contained 80% of the music we had used in the previous year. In typical nerd fashion, I had an Excel spreadsheet with facts and figures to support my decision.

Note - in a previous assignment, the parish decided to do away with commercial hymnals and I created custom seasonal worship aids. There are definite positives and negatives to this approach, but if you are the one ultimately responsible and this suggestion is made, I strongly suggest running as fast as you can in the opposite direction!

Once I decided what hymnal we would purchase, I did some planning. I determined how many books we needed, both assembly and choir versions, and calculated the total cost, including instrumental books, accompaniment resources, freight, etc. Our church seats 500, so I took the total cost divided by 500 (rounded up to whole dollars), and set that as the suggested donation for memorializing hymnals.

I considered additional fundraising ideas - everything from a cabbage roll dinner to a concert where we would pass a basket. I used a multi-media approach to advertising, including bulletin articles, electronic bulletin board, email campaign, and talking to the assembly before all the masses one weekend. I planned a "music sampler" a couple of months after launching the project, thinking once the initial blush of donations slowed, we would generate some enthusiasm for the new hymnal. As it turned out, our parish was incredibly supportive and I had raised the necessary funds within six weeks of introducing the project. We actually had the new books on hand for the music sampler night!

Other things to consider include what you do with the old hymnals, how and when you will actually transition out the old books, and how to adapt upcoming liturgy plans to reflect music in the new hymnals. We were able to donate some of the old hymnals to worthy causes (a music teacher that



wanted to use them for sight-singing training of vocal music students and one of our ministries that want to use them in study of the psalms). We offered folks the opportunity to take one home if they'd like, and we recycled the rest. As for timing, I'm a big proponent of making liturgical changes coinciding with seasonal changes, so we opted to put them out for the first Sunday of Advent.

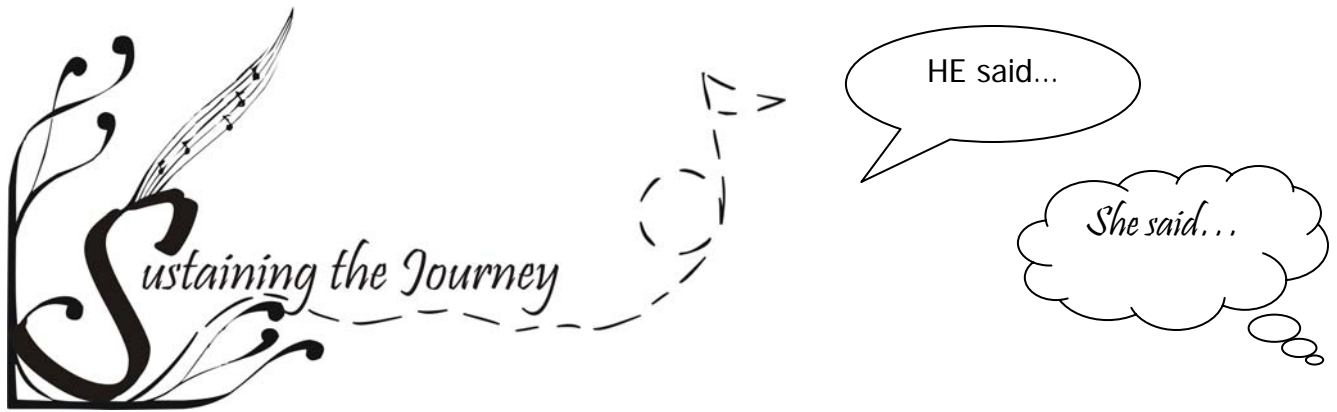
It's exciting to have a new book, with fresh music options and old favorites. It's a challenge to make sure my files and plans are updated with current arrangements and hymn numbers. Ultimately, the beauty of the clean, fresh books adds to the worship environment in very positive ways and improves the sense of welcome to visitors. It's been a worthwhile project, but can take considerable effort and planning. I suppose that's true of any valuable endeavor!

Bob's Perspective:

Our parish is in a first ring suburb with an aging population and changing demographics. Although we are in reasonably good financial condition, we need to be mindful of the future, project and anticipate needs (both short and long term) and actively make sound liturgical, ministerial and financial decisions to ensure viability and vibrancy down the line. As the parish has continued to evolve, our parish income has become substantially less, but because many of our expenses have also dissipated (including no longer being totally responsible for a parish grade school), it has all balanced out very well.

Until the last couple years I honestly had not been a real fan of permanent hymnals. I considered them to be a somewhat limited resource with regard to expanding repertoire and a questionable investment with the potential of becoming prematurely obsolete. Instead, I much preferred renewable subscription resources mainly because of the variety they contain as well as the yearly influx of new material. In addition, purchasing reprint licenses allowed us to move outside of their boundaries when necessary. The parish has utilized such resources since before my involvement – and to this point had served our congregation very well. However, as subscriptions (and shipping charges) continued to become more expensive and projections began to indicate the possibility of them becoming less affordable in the future, it was time to look at other options.

Practical considerations also played an important role. Over the years, we began to print worship aids in our weekly parish bulletin in order to bolster participation with better than a moderate amount of success. In addition, by increasing the utilization of our reprint licenses, the parish repertoire expanded in varied directions to the point that we no longer were dependent upon the yearly influx of new material from our subscription hymnals – thus diminishing that selling point.



Most importantly in the process was prayer and discernment at each step of the way. It was essential to be reasonably sure that our parish was being called in this direction: (1) that our decisions were based on providing the best possible resources in order to enhance and support the quality of our worship experiences, (2) that our resource would be able to provide for future anticipated needs, and (3) that our decision would be founded well in responsible stewardship.

Several hymnals were evaluated. Considerations were made as to the amount of current repertoire contained within, the amount of new and usable material they provided, and financial impact. Through careful budgeting and a successful memorializing program, we were able to purchase new hymnals including choir editions, accompaniment and instrumental editions and the complete hymnal CD library. In determining the suggested donation for memorializing a hymnal, we essentially followed the same formula as Mary. However we created a few price-break points as premiums for those wishing to donate for multiple hymnals. Using the amount of money originally budgeted for one year of subscription hymnals (approximately 50% of the total cost) and temporarily borrowing the rest from one of our parish savings funds, we paid off the hymnals immediately. Through the memorial program we were able to pay back our savings fund within one year.

We introduced the new hymnal on the first Sunday of Advent 2015. Thus far it has been well received and utilized – with a projected savings of approximately \$45, 000 over the next ten years.

Combining the use of our hymnals with the printed worship aids in our weekly bulletin has aided us in providing for vibrant worship with substantial and meaningful assembly participation. We have also found many uses for our CD library – including the convenient ability to review potential repertoire additions and catechetical usage in various educational settings.

With regard to the introduction of new music to the assembly, I am pretty much in the same camp as Mary. Not including psalms, I think that 4 or 5 new songs (significantly used and internalized) in the course of a liturgical year provides well for keeping repertoire fresh and meaningful. If that sounds too little, think about this: if there are 52 weeks in a year, using 4 songs each week without any repeats would mean that one would use 208 songs in the course of a year. Repeating each song one time would mean that one would only use 104 songs in the entire year. My suspicion is that most parishes have well over 104 songs in their repertoire.

Just food for thought!