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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.

## **But I'm Not Dead Yet!**

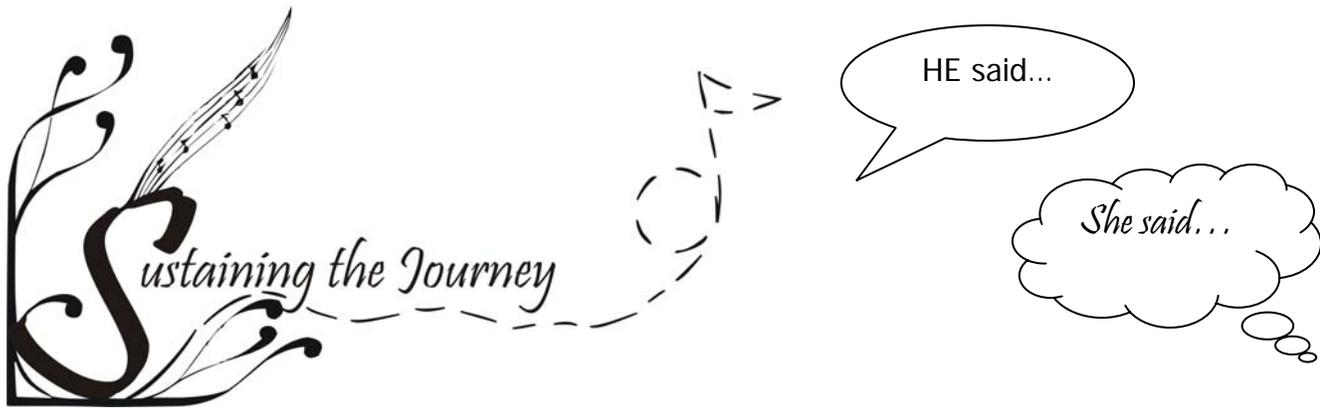
*Mary's perspective:*

One of the most popular programs we have developed has to do with planning for the end of life. We have approached it from the perspective of bereavement ministry and also from the perspective of each of us planning for our own final journey. Often the question is, why do this now? Whether it's because a loved one has passed recently, or we are aware that the feast of All Souls is coming, or because weekend scriptures this time of year point to end times, the topic of *end of life* may be more present this time of year. But the reality is, the best time to plan for end of life is **WHILE YOU'RE STILL ALIVE!**

It is harder to make informed decisions in the midst of grief, and planning well takes time. Being unhurried and taking the time to ponder allows you to put some thought into your own end of life arrangements, and to make choices that best express your wishes. For example, do you want to be an organ donor? What church and/or funeral home do you prefer? What do you want your family to walk away with on their journey, after you're gone? It gives you time to shop around for a funeral director and an attorney - you're making \$10,000 decisions; you probably should choose service providers in keeping with your values and priorities. In addition, it is healthier to plan together with your family. This gives opportunity to communicate your wishes and share your faith. Making some decisions now, and financially preparing for it, can save loved ones from making agonizing choices in the midst of grief.

Without getting too deep into the details, we encourage everyone to consider arrangements such as trusts/wills, power of attorney, living will, pre-paying and pre-planning your funeral, and indicating your wishes in writing. Exploring scriptures and music for the funeral rites can provide comfort and clarity.

From the ministry perspective, the death of a loved one can present overwhelming grief, but is often a time of grace. We are reassured by our faith that this is not the end – and the bereavement process for a grieving family can be a turning point in their faith journey. Funerals present a unique



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opportunity for evangelization. From planning the funeral to the service itself, to outreach in the following months, bereavement ministers are graced with the chance to affect a tremendous positive impact - not only on the family, but on the greater community.

Oh, and one other thought... whether you'd like to host a "Not Dead Yet" workshop, or attend a series for your own benefit, we have a solution! Contact one of us for details...

*Bob's Perspective:*

From the perspective of one who has experienced two very close losses over as many years, I am thankful that in both cases, funerals and end of life arrangements were preplanned and well executed. The preparations didn't take away the pain, but they surely made life much easier. In a time of grief and emotional unrest, I didn't have to worry about making highly impactful financial decisions or agonize over having to make guesses about final wishes. However, it also needs to be said that even with these very well prepared plans in place, there were still a number of loose ends to tie up. I can't begin to image what families who are not prepared (or under prepared) go through at times like this.

The upside of these events can best be summed up by the old adage, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." One of the good things that has come from this is that Mary and I have spent a great deal of time examining how funeral preparations are made in our parishes. We recently developed a planning guide for ministers who help families with funeral liturgy preparations. Five people have stepped forward in my parish to undergo training, so as to be able to work with families, both at the time of death as well as for those who wish to engage the preplanning process.

Three more individuals have come forward to form our newly updated bereavement process. They are currently receiving training from our Diocesan Marriage and Family Office. The goal is to create an integrated parish resource that will provide for the spiritual and practical needs of our parish families from advanced planning through after-death bereavement.

If you or members of your family don't have preparations made (or at least spelled out in some legal fashion) I highly encourage you to consider doing so as soon as possible.