

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.

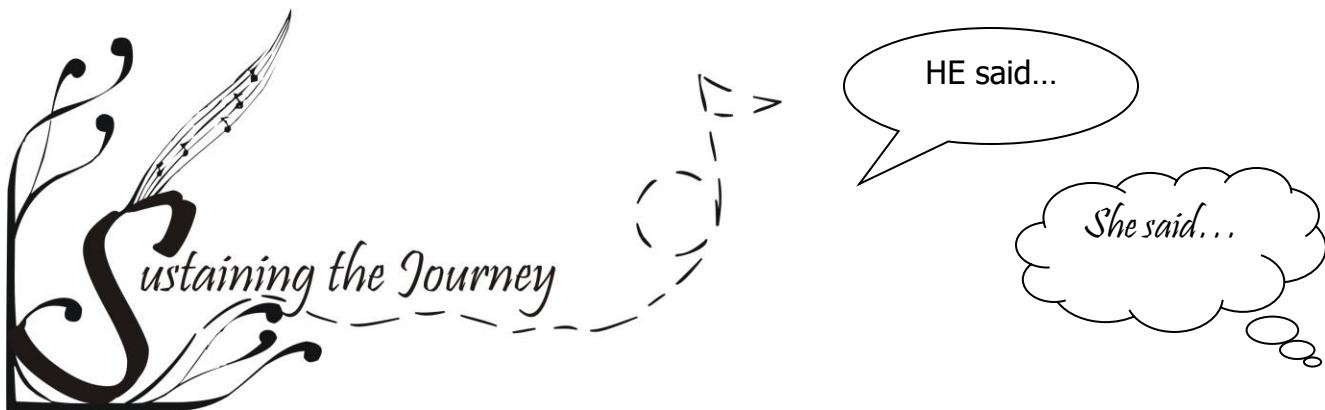
Sing It Like You Believe It

Bob's perspective:

Last evening (10/08/17) Mary and I, along with our good friend and bass player Mike Dragas, had the opportunity to lead Taize Prayer at a wonderful ecumenical retreat center called The Hildegarden (named for St. Hildegard of Bingen [see <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-hildegard-of-bingen/>]) in a little town called Fairport Harbor. Those who came together in our small gathering (about 19 in all) were from varied denominations, parishes and backgrounds. Yet, the worship that we offered to the Almighty through word and song created a very unique spiritual energy that I've not experienced very many times over the years.

After taking some time to reflect, I've come to the conclusion that one of reasons this occurred is because those present sang it like they believed it. It's no secret that over the course of the last few months, this has been my 'battle cry' in my music ministry rehearsals – and to a great extent, it's worked – but not nearly well enough...yet. I would be the first to admit that technical accuracy, diction, et al are important elements - and should most definitely not be discounted. That being said, I'm not sure that we as directors (generally speaking) take enough time to emphasize the importance of projecting spiritual emotion in our music. Now, I'm not talking about the staged or calculated emotion of a performance (such as a musical production). Rather, I'm suggesting that we shouldn't be hesitant or afraid to sing (or play) with feeling and conviction. Furthermore, we should (in gentle ways) encourage our Assemblies to do the same.

I think back to the definition of "music" that John Cage put forth. While I'm sure that this is not the exact quote, it is very much his sentiment: "Music is an experience of sound and silence, whose primary function or concern is to (1) communicate the intention of the composer and (2) solicit an emotional response from the listener." In my younger days, I competed on a number of occasions in local and regional Organ Competitions. I admit that in some ways it was kind of a rush. However, while technically very accurate and precise, I felt that the music played by myself as well as the other competitors was cold and austere – lacking much (if not all) of the emotion and feeling that the composers were attempting to convey in their works. Finding this to be less than tolerable, I began to take liberties with the music I played in competition, much to the chagrin of both the



judging panels and my teacher – to a point where I stopped competing rather than give way to what I wanted my music to project – and what I interpreted as the composer's intentions.

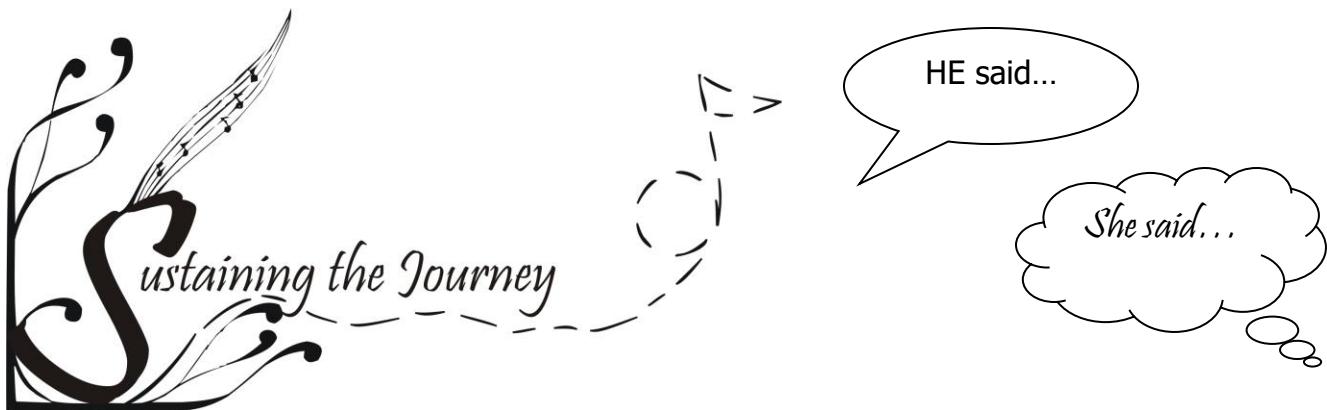
So many times, when speaking about evangelization we say that one of the best ways of spreading the Good News is simply to live it in our daily lives – conversion by example. Maybe it's time that many of us need to apply this to the evangelization of those who gather in our pews week-in and week-out. How often, whether we are in leadership roles or participating in the Ministry of the Assembly do we just play the notes, sing the words, say the prayers and then go our merry way? Or do we live and breathe the music and prayers that we raise in praise, thanksgiving, and worship each week? Just sayin'.

Mary's Perspective

When I was in high school, I had a math teacher who always started class with an Our Father. I vividly remember that he made it a point to speak "*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*" all as one phrase. He would intentionally get out of sync with the rest of the class, to make a point. His point was to draw attention to what we are actually asking - that we may be forgiven in the same way, to the same degree, with the same mercy and compassion, as we treat others. Given that I haven't been in his class in over 30 years and still remember this clearly, point well taken!

I agree with Bob in that we need to be intentional about our singing. Heck, I believe we need to be intentional about our singing and our prayer and our work and our exercise! (We've written before about the importance of mindfulness.) That's why I am often drawn to the dichotomy that an evening of Taize presents... we sing these songs like mantras, over and over, in a way that frees our brains to let the Spirit be present to us. So while we are intentional about it, we are also open to the Almighty touching us. Mindfulness actually takes us to new levels.

When I work with our cantors and our choir, I often say, "do you believe it? Then sing like you mean it!" We talk about the importance of preparation ad naseum, emphasizing the need to really dig into the Scriptures we sing, so that we can effectively communicate God's Word through our music. Now I recognize that the vast majority of folks are not in the same position, leading an assembly in worship. But the same holds true for each of us in our daily prayer. Rather than simply rattle off the words, we are challenged to actually pay attention to what we are saying. Spontaneous prayer (as compared to a scripted prayer) encourages us to be mindful in our conversation with the Almighty.



This is not to discount the technical aspects of sung prayer - diction and note values and tone are all important! But an experience like Sunday reminds me that the technical is only part of the whole picture. So... whether singing or speaking, at the cantor stand or in the middle of the park, let this be our thought of the day... sing it like you mean it!