

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.

Yes, You're a Musician...but do you Pray?

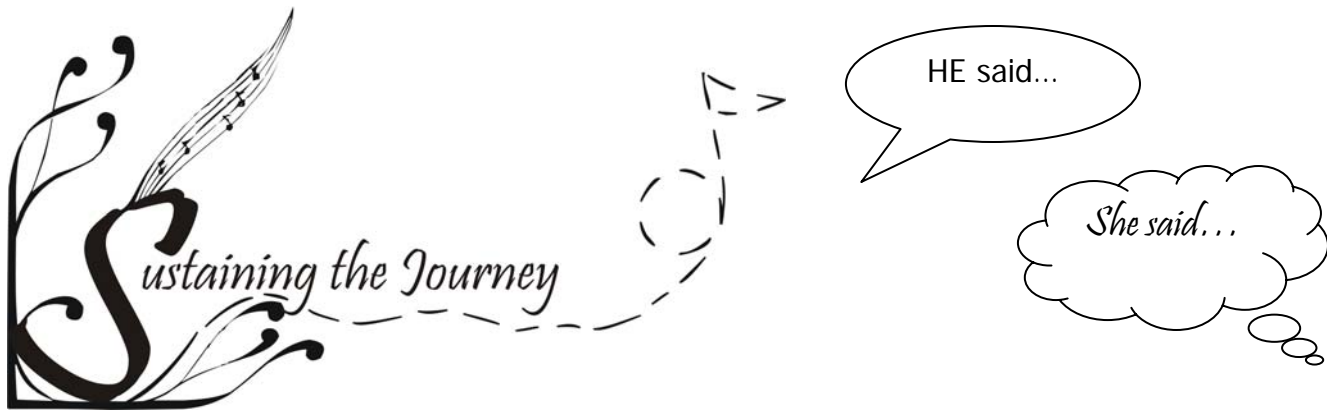
Mary's perspective:

As our calendars have ramped up again and folks are asking us to speak at various events, I marvel at the path we've followed to get here. (Actually, I marvel at the fact that people are actually interested in what we have to share! but I digress...) I began pondering how long we have been involved in church ministry - some 70+ years combined - and that fact alone caused me to stop and first, thank God. Second, kick myself a little because one would think with that kind of experience, I should be better at the day-to-day balance of life!

First things first... thanking God. I recognize that, as I have grown over the years, my relationship with God has changed. In the early days, most of my prayers were petitions, asking God to intervene in my life. As I matured, that prayer morphed into "please, God, let me recognize You as You intervene in my life." Now, when I wake up each morning, I start with gratitude. Thank you, God, that I woke up today, in a warm bed, surrounded by my family. I know that, when Bob pays his bills, he says a prayer of thanks that this month he had enough resources to cover all his expenses and still have enough to eat. It's pretty basic.

Then the events of the day happen and perhaps I don't respond as quickly as I should with a prayer of gratitude. (Note that invoking the Lord's name when the idiot driver in front of you cuts you off, or when the gallon of milk slips out of your hand and splatters on the kitchen floor does NOT count as a true prayer.) As *Sustaining the Journey* has grown, so, too, has my awareness of both the need for, and the lack of, quality prayer time in my life.

Last year I made the conscious decision to turn the radio off in the car. I drive about 35 minutes to work, and the quiet makes for wonderful contemplative time (excluding above-mentioned idiot drivers). I noticed, as I turned off the noise, that I began to see with new eyes. The beauty of the sunrise, the smell of fresh air through the sunroof, and the warmth of my bun warmers have all given me reason to say a quick prayer of thanks.



Sometimes, my prayer is formal. Liturgy, rosary, and formulary prayers before meals, all have their place. But, for me, it is appreciating the Spirit in my life that has opened up a world of conversation between our Lord and me. A walk in the park is a great opportunity to let God lead the next step on the journey - both literally and figuratively. Being mindful in daily activities, even mundane things like paying the bills, is a way to stay connected to the Almighty. It's about getting back to basics.

As liturgical musicians, we are challenged to continue to pray amidst our work. It's easy to get distracted by the intro on the next song, or perhaps tweaking the tuning of the D string on my guitar, or pondering if I want to use a common entrance chant during Lent. But am I really doing my job - leading the assembly to full, active, conscious participation in liturgy - if I, myself, can't get my head there? Practice and preparation certainly help ease the distractions. However, I think we are called to exercise mindfulness. As another Lenten season approaches, perhaps that can be one thing we focus on fixing in our lives...being mindful, so as to be in deeper relationship with God.

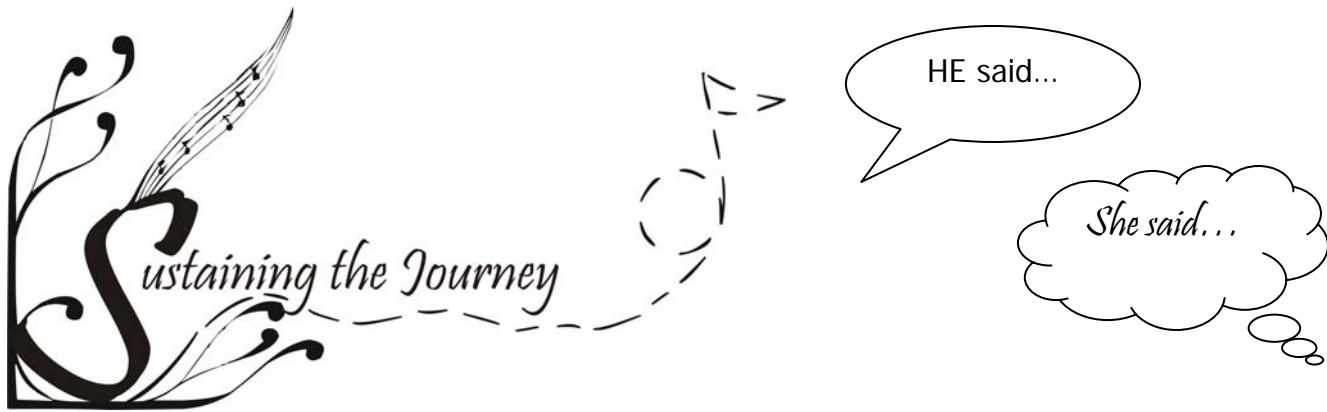
As for the day-to-day balance of life? I've written enough on that for you to know it is a constant source of struggle, challenge, frustration, and effort! However, perhaps if I'm more mindful within the basics of life, I will be more attuned to reclaiming balance.

Bob's Perspective:

Prayer can take many forms. While I obviously believe in the value and importance of Ritual Prayer, I also think that prayerfulness is a state of mind and being. Admittedly, as with most of us in western culture, I don't always have my head in the game, but I constantly call myself to the task of being mindful. "What we pray" isn't always as important as "that we pray." Mindfulness and dedication to our beliefs are essential elements in this regard.

In Mary's perspective, she talks about being thankful. Thankfulness cannot be stated enough. Being mindful of all that God constantly gives to us (or allows us to have) is a prayer in itself - always keeping in the forefront of our minds who we are and *whose* we are helps us to live in a state of thankfulness. This in itself is prayer.

Moreover, dedication and public acknowledgement of the might, power, compassion and abundant love of God is another essential element. This isn't just about what we do inside the walls of a church, but what we also bear witness to in the "outside world." What I am NOT saying is to make a spectacle or blatantly show off one's piety. However, I AM saying that one should not be shy in



this regard. One of the greatest signs given to us is the Sign of the Cross. Again, not to show off, but not to disavow either.

When we make the Sign of the Cross, it is a public gesture of dedication to the God who is unconditionally dedicated to us. Again, I'm NOT saying, "Hey, look at me! I'm making the Sign of the Cross!" But, I AM saying, "This is what I believe and strive to uphold in my life."

Here are some examples:

When in a restaurant, after my food is served, I make the Sign of the Cross, then bow my head and quietly say grace. My sign is not blatant and bold, but it also not apologetic - and doesn't look like a sloppy subdued version of a baseball signal. If I happen to notice a glance from someone, I don't act "all in their face," but I don't shy away either. Many times I offer a polite friendly smile to acknowledge their presence and receive the same from them in return.

When I'm walking or driving, I don't manically look around for churches or cemeteries. However, if I become aware that I'm passing a church, I'll sometimes offer a short prayer of thanksgiving, which may be nothing more than "Thanks God!" for the privilege of living in a place where I can openly worship as I choose, or maybe spend a moment of mindful recollection of something good that has happened in my life for which I'm thankful. Or sometimes, I may take that moment to share a struggle and ask for guidance or wisdom. When I become mindful of passing a cemetery, I offer short prayer for those who have died, "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord..."

Many times as a liturgical musician, I find that cognitively keeping my mind in the Ritual Prayer can be difficult. While there are many moments that are easily engaged, there are also moments (such as preparing the next piece of music to be played, thinking tempos, directive cues, etc.) that can momentarily take me outside of the Ritual Prayer. However, this is where mindfulness can play a key role. The work that we do and the act of aiding others to engage in worship in a deeper way is also prayer – IF we're mindful of that choice.

The question that I pose to myself and those who minister with me is: Are we doing this to show off how good we are, or are we working to be transparent conduits of conversation between God and his people?

That too, is the struggle and the prayer!