

Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives. *WE said* reflects some mutual food for thought.

(And then again, sometimes we're exactly on the same page – just sayin' – *Bob*)

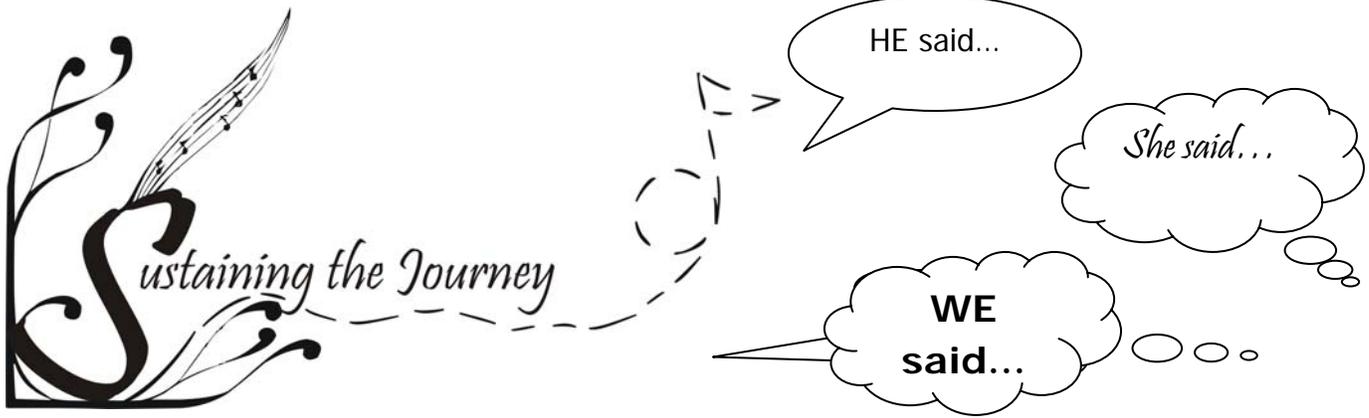
He Said - She Said - We Said: ENGAGING THE ASSEMBLY

With Holy Week upon us once again, we wanted to take some time to encourage you in your ministry, to share a few insights we've gleaned over a combined 70+ years, and to assure you of our prayers. This is the time of year when we are challenged to engage an assembly that often includes "Chreasters" - those who come to Mass at Christmas and Easter, but not much other than that. As church leaders, it is our privilege and responsibility to do our best to enable the Spirit to intervene - to "set the stage" for transforming lives. How, as a lowly and exhausted music minister, do I do that?

Before you answer that, consider Dave's story...

Over the past few years, I have turned into an avid walker. I often frequent the local Metroparks 4 or 5 times each week. I have discovered there is a certain community of people who also like to walk in the park, and the "regulars" become familiar faces. We smile and nod as we pass each other. We recognize what kind of car the other drives. Occasionally, we end up in stride with each other. Conversation helps take the "work" out of "working out", and makes for a pleasant walk.

Dave was one of those Metroparks walkers. Actually, he is more dedicated than me - without fail, Dave walks the same path at about the same time every day. As we have journeyed together, we have learned tidbits about each other. Dave works nearby, and walks at lunch. He owns a company that he built from a hobby in his garage, grew to a thriving medium-sized business, and last year successfully sold it to a German partner company for a tidy profit. He and his wife, a dental assistant, have always lived life fully, travelling to Europe and Tunisia, skiing in Colorado and taking in shows on Broadway in New York City. Dave and his wife enjoy the little moments of life also, walking together in the evening, admiring the budding tulips. Dave used to joke that he walked at lunch to try to increase his pace, so that he could keep up with his wife!



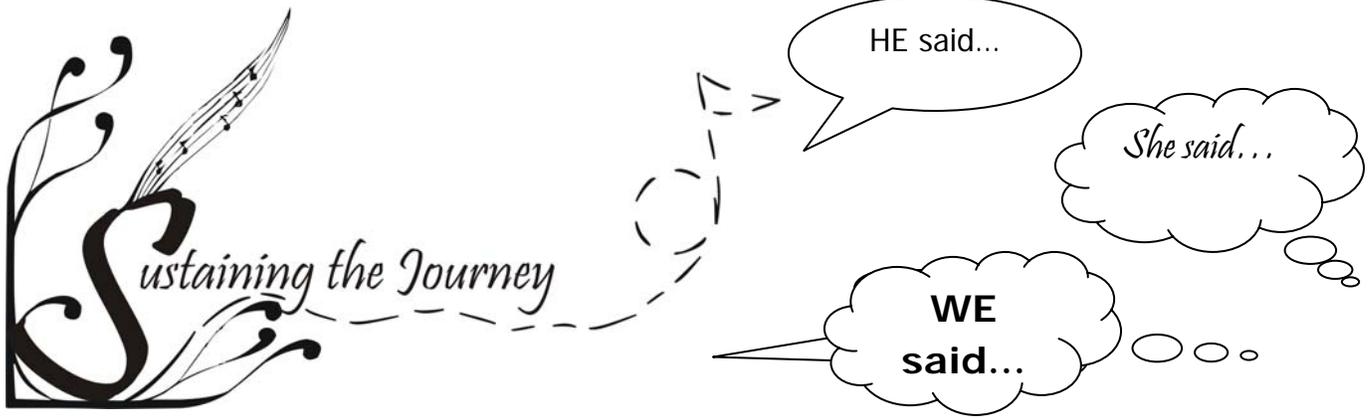
Now I don't know about you, but when I meet someone like Dave, I don't really know the best way to introduce the conversation of faith. So usually, I don't. We talk sports or weather, kids and adventures. (Perhaps that is topic for a future blog - how to share your faith with strangers?) Such was the case with Dave. I didn't know if he belonged to a church, nor what he believed. Somehow, it never came up.

It had been a few weeks since I've seen Dave. With the ebb and flow of work, my walking schedule has been erratic, so I didn't think much of it. Last week we crossed paths, and got caught up. Three weeks ago, the dentist that Dave's wife worked for called Dave in a panic, and told Dave to meet him at the local hospital. Within thirty minutes, the ER physician came out with the devastating news that Dave's wife had passed away. Apparently, when the dentist returned from a meeting, Dave's wife was slumped over her workstation, after a massive heart attack. Dave's wife was only 63, took care of her health, ate well, and exercised regularly. Dave is still, quite understandably, in shock.

And so we talked as we walked, the story unfolding. Dave made a passing comment about the funeral, so I asked where it had been. Turns out it was at the Catholic church 5 miles from my house. That opened the door for a chat about our church experiences. This was very eye opening for me.

Dave had never felt very connected to the church, until his daughters joined the high school youth group. The girls had a great experience with youth group, and it shaped the course of their lives. At the end of senior year, youth group had a family dinner, and Dave took that opportunity to talk to the pastor. Dave explained that, while he had never been really active in the church, his daughter's life was transformed by her youth group experience, such that she had decided to go to a Catholic Jesuit college.

Two days later, that pastor was removed from active duty for allegations of child sexual abuse. A week later, two of the key leaders of the youth group were also removed due to similar charges. Dave never set foot back in the church for 30 years.



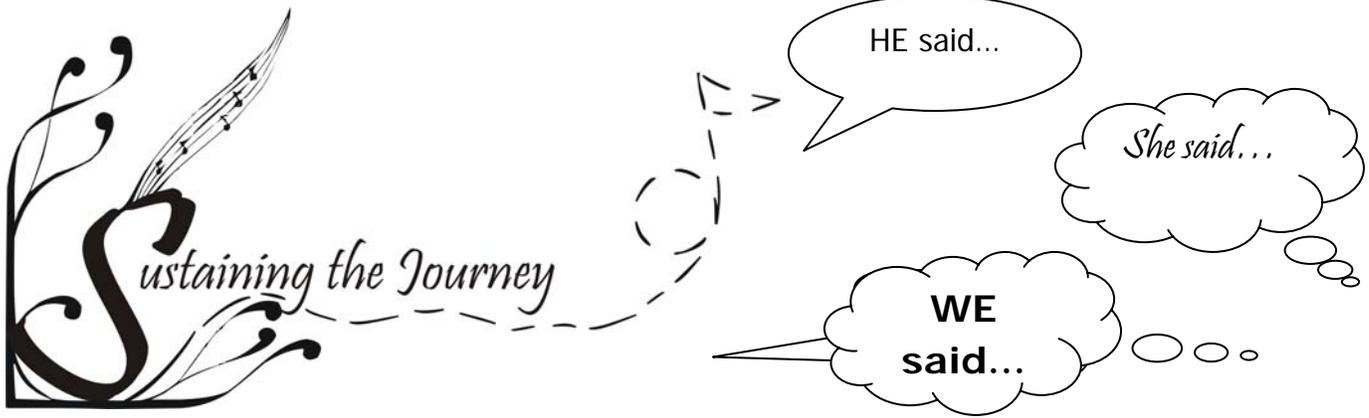
Last year, Dave's mom died. She had been a member of the local Lutheran church, and that's where her funeral was celebrated. The Lutheran minister, Bob, a friend of Dave's, shared a beautiful reflection at the funeral that left a lasting impression. When Dave's wife died, he was faced with a decision: go back to the Catholic church, or to Bob's Lutheran church. Ultimately, he decided to stay with the Catholic church - but asked Bob to provide words of remembrance at the funeral.

As we walked, Dave shared his recent experience of the Catholic church. His first contact was Sr. Susan, who set up a meeting to arrange funeral details. She was compassionate and hospitable, and guided Dave through the process gently. From the songs and readings, to the decision to hold visitation at the church, Sr. Susan listened to the family's wishes and tended to the details. When Dave mentioned his desire to have Reverend Bob offer words of remembrance, Sr. Susan facilitated the connection between the presiding priest and Bob. As funeral experiences go, this was a good one. Although overwhelming, it was truly a celebration of new life.

I am familiar with bereavement ministry, assisting with some 100 funerals each year. From Sr. Susan's perspective, this was likely a challenging situation. Here you had a family who has felt alienated from the church for decades, facing a devastating and sudden loss. Add to it they had preconceived notions about what should be included (the Catholic funeral rite does *not* call for a eulogy), and a desire for ecumenical involvement. Additionally, due to the young age of the deceased and the circumstances, a very large crowd was expected. Although not the norm, sometimes the church is the optimal choice for visitation.

Sr. Susan's compassion and attention to detail made a difficult situation much more bearable for Dave and his family. Dave shared that he was impressed with the church and felt the funeral was a tribute to his wife's life. This entire experience transformed Dave's sense of church, and went a long way towards healing 30-year-old hurts.

The moral of the story? You never know how your ministry will touch lives. Sr. Susan did not walk into that initial meeting thinking she was going to reach out to folks that have been alienated from the church for 3 decades. Perhaps it was just another day at the office, one meeting on her long list of "to-do's", or perhaps she was having a tough day. Dave didn't know. All he knew was that she helped make a very difficult day a little easier to bear.



We are about to tend to the details of multiple celebrations in a short period of time, where we will have the opportunity to touch lives - perhaps familiar faces, families, and even some folks who have deep-seeded hurts that didn't have anything to do with us. What YOU do makes a difference!

It is worth putting forth your best effort, even when you might feel tired or overwhelmed. Help facilitate participation. Be welcoming. Make room for folks! If you are a musician, take the time to practice and play your very best. Keep smiling - you never know when people are paying attention. Most importantly, believe that you are transforming lives.

Know that we support your efforts. Use this forum to share your reflections, best practices, and questions. And remember to take some time for yourself, especially these next few weeks, so that you can stay healthy, holy, and whole. Celebrate the journey!