

# Un-tolled blessing

DEBBIE MENKEN

A tremendous blessing is available to the music ministry of our churches—one which we have not yet begun to realize fully. Out of 3,319 members/directors listed in the 1979 roster of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, only eight were identified with Assemblies of God ministries.

A handbell choir is a fresh, exciting addition that will challenge and inspire ringers, bless the congregation, enrich the worship experience, and glorify our Lord.

There is so much to know about this art and practice that advance preparation is very important. To begin, learn all you can to avoid the common mistakes, then move rapidly to the joys afforded by this ministry.

The best preliminary introduction to any field is a good, comprehensive book. One suggestion is *Musical Excellence in Handbells* by Donald E. Alured, (Broadman Press, paper, \$4.95).

One would naturally think, *The first thing a handbell choir needs is handbells!* But an understanding of some fundamental elements in the manufacture of handbells is necessary before simply sending for a price list and ordering the most reasonably priced set.

A handbell choir ringing two octaves of bells requires 6 to 8 people; three, four, and five octaves require 10 to 12 people. Feel free to have

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more than one group playing the bells. Schedule as many choirs as there is rehearsal time. If the second or third group does not have 10 ringers, a two-octave choir is possible.

Ages of ringers may range from primaries to senior citizens; however, due to the expense and necessary care the bells require, handbell ringing should be reserved for ages

## What bell ringers say

I am a music lover and for years have been blessed by the music ministry of my church. Now the bell choir has given me an excellent opportunity to participate. I am able to team up with others in what I consider unusual and beautiful ministry. At the same time I am improving my musical skills as we strive for perfect timing, accept the discipline of close teamwork, and continually learn new music.

The bell choir affords an excellent opportunity for persons with limited training to make a contribution to the music ministry of the church.

—Mario Hoover

Because handbells are a unique form of music, the handbell choir has a unique opportunity to lead people into worship. It's exciting to be a part of this ministry!

In a bell choir each member must ring the correct bell at precisely the right

of responsibility.

The more proficient a choir is in reading music, the more rewarding will be the musical product. The available repertoire provides music that will challenge the most advanced ringer. On the other hand, handbells can be used to teach music reading. Schulmerich has published *Learning Packages for Handbells* for this purpose. One suggestion, however, is that each group be as homogeneous in technical and musical ability as possible. The group will thus progress together with ease and enthusiasm.

"Bells are holy instruments dedicated to the worship of God and must always be used for His glory. . . ." So read the Belfry Rules from the Church of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew in Ashelworth, England, in 1845. These ringers knew . . . that the purpose of bells was to sound a peal for Christendom!"\* Δ

\*"Sound a Peal for Christendom," a research paper written by Debbie Menken while a student at the University of Minnesota.

time. Each note is a necessary part of the arrangement. In the same way I believe that in a worship service the Lord desires to hear the voice of each individual, whether it be a loud shout of praise or a quiet "hallelujah."

—Judy Kempka

When I was asked to direct the handbell choirs, I realized my first responsibility was to set a goal. Why do the handbells exist? Why did my particular church invest in them? How could we use them for the Lord?

I determined that our goal was to initiate worship and praise unto the Lord. Without His anointing we are a sounding brass or tinkling cymbals.

It is my prayer that our bell choirs will never be entertainment, but always ministry.

—Christine Hammar

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