



UNTOLLED BLESSING

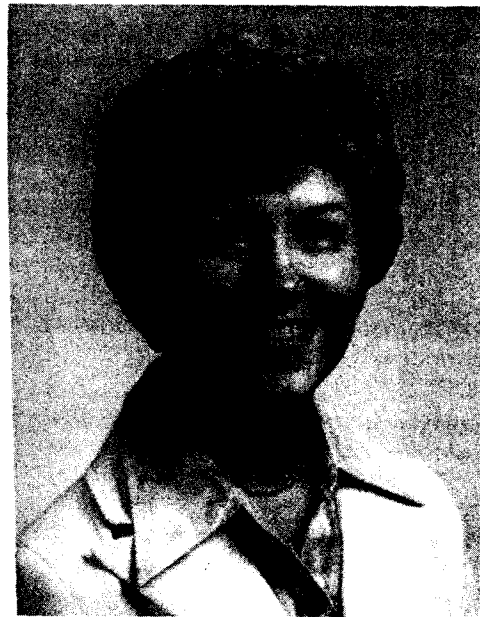
by Debbie Menken, Student
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, California

There is a tremendous blessing available to the music ministry of our churches which we have not yet begun to fully realize. 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, and move rapidly to the joys afforded by this ministry.

The best preliminary introduction to any field is a good, comprehensive book. Two fine ones are *Joyfully Ring*, by Donald E. Allured, published by Broadman Press, 1974, \$3.25 (a guide for handbell ringers and directors); and *Handbell Ringing*, by Scott Parry, published by Carl Fischer, Inc., 1961, \$2 (a musical introduction for the new bell choir). (Editor's note: while Debbie was a student at the University of Minnesota, she wrote two research papers extensively covering the subject of handbells. One was *Sound a Peal for*



Christendom! The Historical Religious Heritage of Bells; and The Acoustics of Campaniforms.)

One would naturally think, "The first thing a handbell choir needs is handbells!" But, an understanding of some very fundamental elements in the manufacture of handbells is necessary before simply sending for a price list and ordering the most reasonably priced set. There are primarily four foundries of handbells around the world (although there are more agents). One of these foundries is in England, where handbells originated; one is in Holland, where bells are manufactured in the Dutch and Flemish tradition; and two are in the United States, where handbells are cast in the English tradition.

The important thing to note is this: Dutch bells have many overtones (faintly vibrating pitches in addition to the strike tone). Surprisingly, many of these pitches are not in the harmonic series (basically, not in the chord built on that note). Many times, the overtones of these handbells will sound dissonant to the handbells—especially pronounced in rich harmonic textures.

English handbells have only one overtone—the twelfth, an octave and a fifth above the strike tone (fundamental), which is perfectly in tune. This is the best choice of an overtone because the twelfth appears in both major and minor triads and comprises the element necessary to achieve true bell timbre. The English- and United States-made handbells are manufactured in this way, and for that reason are preferred by many handbell ringers.*

A handbell choir ringing two octaves of bells requires six to eight people; three, four, and five octaves requires ten to twelve people. Feel free to have more than one group playing the bells. As many choirs as there is rehearsal time may be scheduled. If the second or third group does not have ten ringers, a two-octave choir is possible.



A handbell choir Debbie directed at CBC

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

The more proficient a choir is in reading music, the more rewarding will be the musical product. The available repertoire provides extremely virtuosic music that will challenge the most advanced ringer. On the other hand, handbells can be used to teach music reading. Schulmerich (see address at end of article) has published *Learning Packages for Handbells* for this express 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.

Any serious aspirant in this art and ministry should thoroughly study bell ringing. An excellent series of courses is taught annually by Robert Ivey, former president of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers. Courses include *Beginning Handbells*, *Advanced Handbells*, and *Handbell Arranging*. If interested in attending a summer session, write to:

Daniel Pratt, Director of Summer Session
Westminster Choir College
Princeton, NJ 08540

Much benefit is to be gained from joining the *American Guild of English Handbell Ringers* (AGEHR). For the \$15 initial membership fee and \$12 annual renewal, one receives a subscription to *Overtones* (the official bimonthly journal of the Guild); membership and newsletters of local chapters; invitations and information on national and area festivals; and an annual roster of all Guild members. The journal is filled with inspiring and informative articles on handbell ringing as well as advertisements of all the latest supplies and equipment. Available from the Guild is an extremely valuable repertoire listing of everything published for handbells. If you would like to join the Guild, contact Mary V. Kettelhut, Registrar at the following address:


American Guild of English Handbell Ringers
Yankee Hill Road
Rt. #1, Box 118
Bennet, NE 68317

“ ‘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!”**

*Bell Foundries and Manufacturers
Whitechapel Bell Foundry, Ltd.
32 & 34 Whitechapel Road
London, E. I., England

Schulmerich Carillons, Inc.
Carillon Hill
Sellersville, PA 18960

Whittemore Associates, Inc.
3 Wexford St.
Needham Heights, MA 02194
(Agent for Petit and Fritsen—Dutch bells)

Malmark, Inc.
100 Doyle St.
Doylestown, PA 18901
(Also sold by I. T. Verdin Company) 

***Sound a Peal for Christendom*, by Debbie Menken