



QUAVERS

AREA VIII: ILLINOIS, IOWA, KANSAS, MISSOURI, NEBRASKA
JULY, 2007

RINGING WITH LIMITED NUMBERS

Greetings!

Hope you are all having a great summer! This is a wonderful time to be thinking of next year's choir plans. Some churches have the bells but not a lot of ringers. This issue will be giving all kinds of ideas on **Ringling with a Limited Number of Ringers**. I went to my director, Ryan Cox, of the First Congregational Church of La Grange, Illinois. He has had this experience the past couple of years in working with our kids. Here are some wonderful ideas that he gave me.

Music selection: If the group is more advanced or experienced, use duets, trios, quartets or *5 by 5*. For less experienced groups there are some *Twelve + 1* bell music that is accessible, rated at level 1+ or so. You still need five-six ringers for these. For smaller or inexperienced groups, break up bell solo music so that every-one rings part of the melody. Add half and whole notes to this so the ringers are more engaged and the piece sounds fuller. Also, bell peals and ostinato patterns on hymns are good.

Scheduling: No magic there, prayer works best!

Rehearsal techniques: With a small group, the faster they get better, the sooner more interesting music can be attempted. Start very basic and stay there until all are comfortable — what's a quarter note, half note, whole note, how do I ring that, how do I damp, etc. With kids, it is good to teach them the special techniques right away because they love them. Don't pick pieces until techniques are conquered. With adults who have never rung or have rung just a little, stress counting.

Recruiting: For adults, set up "workshops" where they get to ring the bells in a no-pressure situation. Don't introduce new inexperienced ringers into an established group. (He did this last year with three ringers for one song and we kept two of them this past year.)

Performing: With small groups, each person's mistakes are magnified because there are fewer bells being used. A balance must be struck for each group between using performance as a goal and being comfortable doing it. There is such a thing as over-rehearsing, where the pieces get stale and the ringers are less aware during the performance.

Teach ensemble-specific ringing: Have the ringers memorize a section and then look at each other to make sure they are ringing at the same time and are presenting themselves similarly. This works wonders for ringing together.

Think outside the box: One idea might be to take a piece written for a melodic instrument (flute, violin, etc.) and arrange the accompaniment for bells. You can still use the piano to fill out the sound. Bell trees also work great when you have a small number of ringers because one ringer can ring a lot of bells.

I hope these ideas give you some help if you are facing this problem. Have a great summer and don't forget to start planning for the Area VIII Conference in Peoria, IL in June 2008!!

Debbie Llewellyn ~ Area VIII Chair

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MAKE THE BEST OF YOUR SITUATION

Much of the advice we dispense on the topics we discuss here really should start with "it depends." It depends on what level of music you ring; it depends on how many bells you have; it depends on how many ringers you have. God bless those organizations with an overabundance of ringers. Hopefully they also have multiple bell sets so their ringers can double-up on parts (a great training tool, by the way).

For those of us back in the real world, we generally have too many parts and not enough ringers. My own small group rings level 1-2 music on only two octaves, but we have two ringers who travel for a living and usually can't make half the rehearsals. I assign their parts accordingly (they often get the top or bottom part or the least busy middle part, aka the "boring" part), and we're only scheduled to play in church once every six weeks so that hopefully everyone will be able to get in at least three rehearsals plus the Sunday morning warm up per piece (we only work on one piece at a time).

For less beginner groups, there's always the old stand-by of 4-in-hand, but musicality can suffer. This is generally limited to 5s, 6s, and 7s. **Come to our workshop in Peoria on November 3 to learn how!!**

Groups who can afford it or are part of a multi-group organization often have the luxury of extra bells sets from which to borrow. A five octave group I played with in Pennsylvania eliminated the #11 position by having the #7 and #8 ringers Shelley the B6 and C7. We bought an extra Bb7, B7, and C8 to have duplicates to cover these bells when needed. Even The Agape Ringers assign duplicate bells elsewhere on the table, especially for those nasty chromatic passages.

Then there are more advanced groups, like Quadrille, a quartet from within The Agape Ringers consisting of Kim Ahlgrim, Kristin Paul and Illinois AGEHR's very own KC Congdon and Sharon Schmidt. They play lots and lots of bells with few people because they *want* to, not because they *have* to. Some advice from Quadrille that can carry over into your own not-enough-ringers issues:

Pick music that is linear, not chordal. Quadrille often uses piano arrangements of music that are already simplified, at least as far as the number of notes being played at the same time is concerned.

Leave out notes when the chords are too thick. Keep the melody and the bass anchor notes, maybe bringing the bass notes up an octave. Sometimes experimentation is the only way to figure out what notes can be left out and still have a decent sound.

Don't be afraid to change techniques. Mallets can be a lifesaver!

Assign "creatively." Kristin Paul, Quadrille's primary "assigner," learned a lot in a class she took with Katryn Howell of Campanile (and the year she spent ringing with them). Don't be stuck with the keyboard model. Assign the busiest notes equally among the ringers and plug in the occasional notes after the fact. Sometimes this might mean everybody physically shifting up or down the table. Having one person spend the time pre-assigning a piece will keep the parts balanced and save time in rehearsal.

Debi Robey ~ Illinois State Chair



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NOT A FULL CHOIR?

Almost all directors have had to come up with some way to play with just not enough ringers. Sometimes that means 4-in-hand in the top bells or keeping those bass bells very busy. I currently only have six ringers (if they all show up) to play bells in my choir so I have had to come up with ideas to help us to sound musical.

Our first obstacle is finding a time to practice. My choir is made up of four confirmation students, one high schooler and one "young at heart." I have found that having practice right before confirmation on Wednesday nights works best for the parents that have to bring the ringers to practice. They just have to come forty-five minutes early and when our practice is done they head off to confirmation. This time also works well with the non-confirmation ringers as well.

Having practice before confirmation also gives us a chance to encourage other confirmation students or parents to come and join our group as they get to hear us practice our songs and having fun. I've been known to split a part at the last minute or get a bystander to cover an open spot during practice to include someone who is showing interest while they are listening to us playing.

I find that I spend a lot of time trying to find new and different songs for this small group to play. This past year we spent a lot of time playing out of the *Twelve Bells* series. These songs seem to work well but for my beginner group some of the rhythms and songs were hard. I also look at two-octave music and only play from C5 up. Sometimes when the melody goes in the base line we just cut out those measures and it seems to work.

Even though we are small in numbers we still make beautiful music and have a lot of fun. Being willing to change and adapt is a must when working with a handbell group and this is especially true when you are working with small groups.

Exchanging ideas that work for you is a great way to strengthen your handbell groups. If you have any ideas, suggestions or questions feel free to contact me and I'd be glad to chat.

Kathryn Jaeger ~ Iowa Chair

Visit our website at www.agehr-ia.org and let us know if you would like to host an event or workshop.





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RINGERS IN SHORT SUPPLY?

Ringling with a limited number of ringers...wow! Isn't that the \$64,000 question? This is a problem that every director must tackle at some point. I always address this problem by trying to avoid it! Which brings me to the topic I want to talk about: recruiting techniques.

The easiest recruiting technique, by far, is simply to ask someone to be in your choir! Yes, it's true. I have gotten more people to ring by simply and personally asking them. Many people had never even thought about it, or they thought they weren't good enough, when in reality they had all the tools to be a great ringer. At the start of each year, I sit down and recruit for my children's choirs. I get the Sunday school roster and begin calling. I had a mother let me know that her daughter only rang bells because I called and asked her to! And, she loved it and became a very dedicated member of the choir! So, some valuable advice learned from experience: don't be afraid to ask!

How do you get people interested in ringing bells? By performing! The more you play in church, the better your chances of having someone become interested. The more you perform *outside* your church; your chances will increase dramatically! I've gained many a ringer after a really good performance. They notice how much fun we are having, how musical bells can be, etc. and they want to be a part of it! Everyone wants to be part of something good! So, do good work in rehearsal and put on a really fine performance. It will pay off in many ways, including getting good ringers.

Recruiting ringers is important, but more important than that is *keeping* good ringers. I like to sit down with a new ringer and lay out exactly what I expect. Mainly, I expect them to be at all rehearsals and performances, and if they can't, they must send a sub. I try and create an atmosphere of "we can't do it without you", which is true! I expect that out of my auditioned group, but I also expect that out of my beginning group. The ever-important "team spirit" is a great recruiting tool and retention tool.

Let's say you've done all the recruiting and performing and calling and you still have a small group. Get out the small ensemble music! If you have five solid ringers that always show up, get out the 5 by 5's! If you have four, pull out the quartets! Many two and three octave pieces can be rung with a few ringers with a little creative bell assigning. Be creative! If you have a few children, have them play bells with the children's vocal choir. You can easily write a part out for them and get them playing. A few bells, a few rhythm instruments, and you have them hooked!

I challenge you all to make recruiting and member retention a priority for the next year. Sometimes the "if you build it, they will come" just doesn't hold true. You have to foster relationships and attitudes. It will pay off for your choir, which in turn, pays off for each and every ringer!

Happy Summer!

Judy Scharmann ~ Outgoing Kansas State Chair



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If you have not yet faced the dilemma of not having enough people to ring in handbell choir, you're lucky. But, someday, you probably will face this situation.

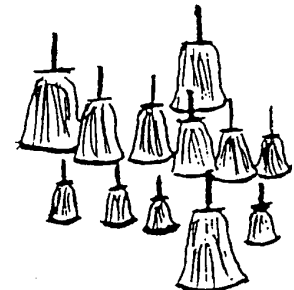
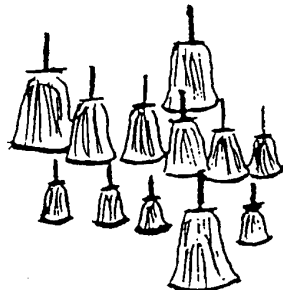
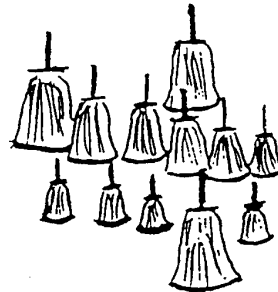
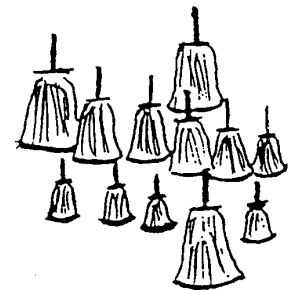
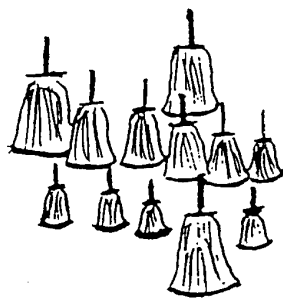
You can try recruiting ringers from outside your church or organization. In many towns, there are often people who have ringing experience, but no available opportunity to ring. What a great way to make new friends, and bring different congregations together.

If I don't have enough ringers for a full choir, I will often teach them to ring as a small ensemble. These are people who already read music and, usually, play another instrument. When someone has basic music skills, it's just a matter of teaching them a new instrument. The *Five by Five* series is good for this purpose, because each part is on a separate sheet. Quartets, trios, and duets can also be done; the ringers each read their own particular line.

For a beginning group, you can often have the ringers ring only the melody line, and use piano accompaniment. Over the years, I have had handbells ring the bell part of an orchestral piece, I have had bells ring the solo instrument part and piano adapt the handbell part on a bells plus piece, and I've had bells ring accompanying chords while another instrument played the melody line.

If you only have a few ringers, look at this as an opportunity to create something new in your church.

Kathy Harrison ~ Missouri State Chair



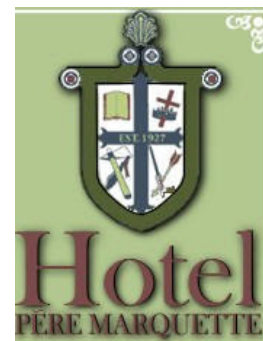


AGEHR SPONSORED EVENTS

2007/2008	EVENT	CLINICIAN	LOCATION
Jul 18-21	National Seminar 2007 Beyond the Printed Page: Pursuing Musical Artistry with Handbells & Handchimes	various	Dallas, TX http://www.agehr.org/learning/seminar.asp 800-878-5459
Oct 4-7	Distinctly Bronze	David Davidson	New Bern, NC www.agehr.org/learning/dbindex.asp 800-878-5458
Nov 3	Illinois State Ringer Workshop	The Agape Ringers	Northminster Presbyterian 10720 N Knoxville Ave Peoria, IL www.il-agehr.org
Jun 19-21 2008	Area VIII Conference	Raleigh Ringers	Peoria, IL www.areaviii.org/
Aug 4-8 2008	International Symposium	various	Orlando, FL www.agehr.org/learning/intlsym.asp 800-878-5459
Aug 6-8 2008	Distinctly Teen	Tim Waugh Jason Wells	Orlando, FL www.agehr.org/learning/intlsym.asp 800-878-5459



2008
Area VIII Conference
June 19-21
Peoria, IL
Mark your calendars!





UPCOMING CONCERTS

2007	CONCERT	LOCATION	CONTACT
Jul 12 7:00p	Desert Bells of Phoenix, AZ Dir—Kay Cook	Manchester UMC 129 Woods Mill Rd Manchester, MO	Sherry Boland 636-294-7506
Jul 13 7:00p	The Agape Ringers	First Congregational UCC 815 S Concord Rd Oconomowoc, WI	Karl Kay 262-490-2411 262-567-4461 (church)
Aug 5 2:00p	Rezound!	Avondale UMC 3101 NE Winn Rd Kansas City, MO	www.rezound.org
Aug 12 6:30p	Rezound!	First Baptist Church 2 NE Douglas St Lee's Summit, MO	www.rezound.org
Aug 18 6:30p	Rezound!	First UMC 422 Chestnut Leavenworth, KS	www.rezound.org
Sep 23 4:00p	The Agape Ringers	St Peter Lutheran Church 111 W Olive Arlington Heights, IL	Wally Luettschwager 847-259-4185 (church)
Oct 14 4:00p	The Agape Ringers	St Paul Lutheran Church 515 S Wheaton Ave Wheaton, IL	www.stpaulwheaton.org 630-668-0020 (church)

You too can have your handbell choir concerts posted on the calendar page. Just send your information to:

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Deadlines are the FIRST of the even number months.

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