

Organizing a Handbell Program

# Recruitment & Assimilation

by Karen Eastburn



a resource for members of  
**Handbell Musicians**  
O F A M E R I C A

## **Organizing a Handbell Program - Recruitment & Assimilation**

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# Introduction

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A crucial part of organizing a new handbell choir is finding musicians to ring. But it's not a simple matter of asking people if they would like to be in the bell choir and expecting a resounding "Yes!"

Finding new handbell musicians is a three-step process consisting of first defining your target groups and then marketing the opportunity in order to recruit those who will be a good fit, followed by a plan to assimilate them into the group to ensure immediate and continued success.

## Step 1: Define your target group(s)

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This can be as simple as an age group, such as middle school or adults. Or, you may want to attract people from a certain geographic area, like the neighborhood around your church, to offer ringing to the community. Knowing and empathizing with your target group will help you find ways to appeal to their wants and needs.

### **Grow your own**

If your target group is middle school, consider, in addition to recruiting middle school students, also beginning a ringing program with bells or chimes for children. Then you have a steady pool of experienced and enthusiastic ringers to move into your middle school choir. It might be a weekly group or just a seasonal experience that will expose the children to ringing and pique their interest. Sometimes, parents can even be enticed to ring after seeing the fun the kids are having!



Throughout our interactive e-books, click on links in the sidebar to find more online, download supplemental documents, watch videos, contact the author, and more.

## Start with an established population

If your church already has an active youth group, senior group, Sunday school, vacation bible school, or choir, this is a built-in way to start a new group. Introducing ringing to the group can be done in a variety of ways: Bring in a performing group to generate interest, offer a hands-on class, and add ringing as an activity to enhance the group's programming, like a group-building activity or rote ringing.

Also, if you can gain the support and enthusiasm of a few key people, if you've sold it to the "cool crowd," that will guarantee your success; they will invite and bring in the others. Without these "salespeople," it can be a longer, more difficult task to accomplish.

## Step 2: Sell, sell, sell!

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As you are out looking for your "salespeople," don't forget that you are the lead salesperson in creating enthusiasm and energy for starting or rebuilding your ringing program. You must adopt the attitude that this is something so great that you can't stop talking about it—everywhere, to everyone! Actually, this will become your state of being because recruitment season never ends. Just when you think you have your ringing personnel set, someone will move, marry, have a baby, or just quit. Constant recruiting will hopefully give you a lead on the ringer who can fill that next spot. And, if you are fortunate enough to have or acquire duplicate bells or chimes, you can go ahead and start a new ringer at any time after you've made a successful "sell."

## The secret to successful recruitment

Are you ready? I'm going to lay it out for you. The secret to successfully recruiting new handbell ringers can be summed up in two words: personal invitation. Reaching out—to friends, acquaintances, and the person at the store who sees your handbell shirt—will be successful if you make it personal for them. To elaborate, your conversation must



relate what ringing offers you plus what it might offer them. Here's a way to remember the elements of a P.E.R.S.O.N.A.L. invitation:

### **Person to person**

Flyers, articles in the newsletter, and other less personal invitations can be effective in grabbing attention, but it's the sharing between people that really sells the ringing experience. Let's face it; handbell ringing requires a lot of commitment, so it's up to us to sell what ringers can also get out of it (i.e., what makes it worth all that effort and commitment). Think about your own answer to that, ask your ringers why they choose to ring, and you'll have your own unique selling points to share with prospective ringers.

### **Enthusiastic**

Your enthusiasm must come through in your conversation. Share why you started, what's fun about it, how you think ringing makes a difference in others' lives, and what you think this individual person might also find in the experience.

### **Ready to share**

Willingness to personally invite and share is essential, but preparation is also key. Think through what you will say to someone before the opportunity presents itself. Gather three key points that sell your handbell program for kids, for youth, and for adults. Have a business card on hand with contact information, so this person can follow up later. If you are really good, you'll walk away with the prospect's phone, Facebook, or email information.

### **Subjective**

In addition to your three selling points above, your conversation should involve listening so that you can offer subjective information relating to that person's experience and background. Does she have children? You will want to mention that free childcare is available onsite. If this is a college student, mention another college student who rings in your group and how it works around his class schedule.

## **Outside your walls**

Internal publicity is always warranted and is usually where we find most of our new ringers, but if our mission as a church is to reach out, then it is critical that you also use outside publicity to reach those not already connected with your church. Certainly flyers in public places, posts on community calendars, and notices to other music groups are always good, but try to empower your ringers to wear their shirts, buttons, etc., when they go out; to take business cards with them; to post on their Facebook pages about what they do, and to send personal invites to Facebook friends; and to invite members of the community band they play in, their Bunco group, or the neighbor next door who played clarinet in high school. The opportunities are many if you just take them.

## **Now**

“Now” is a word describing the present state but also one that continues. “Now” is always occurring, and is when you need to be radically recruiting, because you never know when or where your next ringer will be found.

## **Attitude**

Make up your mind that recruiting is fun, will gain you new friends, will share a bit about handbell ringing and yourself with others, and is a good thing. A positive attitude will gain you much more opportunity to talk about your ministry than keeping all the fun to yourself. But you must decide you will do it.

## **Love**

It’s for the love of the church—of God and of His people—that we talk to others about ringing and want to include others in the ministry of ringing. We have love to share, and ringing is how we do it. Who wouldn’t want to be a part of that?

## A state of readiness

Always be prepared if a new ringer should actually show up at your rehearsal. This sounds basic, but you don't want to stare at the person blankly while you are thinking, "How am I going to show you how to ring, when we perform on Sunday? And do this without frustrating the other ringers?" Anything, from observing to doubling a part or malletting a note, or even just getting acquainted, is sufficient. The goal is to make the person feel welcomed and a part of the group. Avoid saying, "I'm sorry, I don't have time to show you ringing basics tonight. Can you come back?" Try instead, "It's great to meet you, and we're glad you are here. Come on in!" Lay out the agenda for them: "Let's introduce everyone, and then you can observe our rehearsal and, before you leave, let's set a time when you and I can work together on what you need to learn to ring." In other words, don't sideline your rehearsal plans, but include the person in any way possible, and set a definite time to meet again. After two or three individual sessions, you may have a ringer confident enough to join the group rehearsal.

## A set of bells is a set of bells

So, what if your church owns six octaves of bells and chimes, and you only ring two octaves? Don't set such a high standard for resurrecting your program that you never get anywhere. Get a small group going while constantly putting out the word that you are having a great time and there is always room for one more person.

## Prepare your choir to be welcoming

If you know a new ringer is attending rehearsal, be sure your ringers know in advance what the person's name is, where they are going to ring (or if they are observing), and any other pertinent information. Make sure they get the person gloves and show them around and introduce them to other members of the choir. That way, whoever is there when the new ringer arrives will already know she was coming, what her name is, and how they can begin helping her feel comfort-

### Adult Registration

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
Home phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail address (please print) \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you ring handbells? YES ☐ NO ☐  
Do you read music? Bass ☐ Treble ☐  
Are you interested in a lesson to ring about?  
YES ☐ NO ☐  
I am available for rehearsal:  
☐ 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (beginners)  
☐ 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. (beginners)  
☐ Substitutes for the above checked rehearsal:  
Name you can give lesson: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name you can give lesson about: \_\_\_\_\_  
Other info: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Student ☐ Parent  
☐ Organization ☐ Other

### Notes about ME!

Previous musical experience (not required): \_\_\_\_\_  
My job is \_\_\_\_\_  
The things I do for fun are \_\_\_\_\_  
List any activities that may conflict with rehearsal:  
How often? \_\_\_\_\_  
My favorite hobby is \_\_\_\_\_  
My favorite candy or treat is \_\_\_\_\_  
My worst habit is \_\_\_\_\_  
My pet's name is \_\_\_\_\_  
My favorite foods are \_\_\_\_\_  
This year I hope we will \_\_\_\_\_  
My favorite hymn or Bible verse is \_\_\_\_\_  
I play other instruments: please list \_\_\_\_\_  
I would like information about: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Instrumental groups ☐ Choir ☐ Youth group ☐ Other

Printed 2—stick in a booklet on concert and on in box!



able. While most of this is common sense, don't leave it to chance.

If you are doubling a part, try to talk with the established ringer ahead of time, so they are not blindsided by this information. While it is an honor to be asked to help a new ringer, it is also a responsibility, and ringers sometimes feel cheated by sharing a part. However, if they understand that their efforts will lead to a new, capable, and independent ringer, it makes the sacrifice worthwhile. As a matter of fact, my choice of mentor ringer has done this enough that the extra folder needed for doubling is simply called the "Becki" folder because she has used it so much with new ringers. It's a title of honor, and it seems more inviting to a visitor than the "extra folder." The word "extra" implies unnecessary, additional, and not required, and that is NOT the way we want a new ringer to feel.

### **Pump up the FUN factor**

People join groups for a lot of reasons, but one of the main reasons is fun. This is definitely one of our selling points. When you have social activities, be sure you take a picture of the group having fun. It need not be elaborate; just bring a plate of brownies and, after rehearsal, people will hang around for a few minutes and chat. Or, after a performance, you might meet up somewhere for lunch. As leaders we need to be the ones that get this going by planning, or asking a ringer to plan, times for fellowship.

Make sure you highlight in your articles and personal conversations the most fun performance you've given, as well as anything fun and exciting coming up.

Try to be objective and consider how others perceive your group. Would the outside observer think that you're having fun, or at least enjoying ringing? Do you enjoy being together?

## Tag team approach

This is where you find another area, like youth ministries or a special event, where handbell ringing could be added to the activities. We all have events where the organizers would love to have some “entertainment,” and this can work to your advantage. Offer to bring in handbells or handchimes as a group-building or icebreaker activity, or pass out bells or chimes and do chord ringing or *Ring Along Songs* by Ardis Freeman. Take note of who really seems to enjoy it, plan a short-term commitment ringing activity as a trial, and invite them right then and there. Sometimes people will try something when they feel it isn’t an open-ended commitment. Make sure the short-term choir has a special purpose for being, such as a performance on a special Sunday or other highlighted event that will provide lots of visibility and purpose for the group.

A situation in which another program/area needs a boost could be an opportunity to add handbell ringing. Many churches use ringing as part of their choir hour, so that all the children sing and ring. This kind of blending benefits both programs, since children who like to sing will experience ringing, and those who come for the ringing will be singing.

Also part of a tag team approach is to directly ask for help from another area of your church. In our church, the two areas might be Sunday school and the youth department. As you make your plans for an activity that will entice people to try ringing, consider how these staff people or volunteers in the area might help you. Then, be very specific and ask, being sure to get a commitment.

For example, ask the youth director to include your new youth ringing group (or whatever you plan) in his youth schedule and publicity—to basically consider it part of the programming for youth. To go further, ask him to talk with the youth and recommend five he thinks should be involved. Conversely, be certain that you also support the youth program by not conflicting with their planned activities, just as he should respect your scheduled meetings. This kind of cooperation will serve to make the entire church stronger and more connected, not just one or the other area.

Recently I've experienced a new influx of former youth ringers returning after college to ring in the adult evening ensemble. I have periodically organized a college bell choir in coordination with the Micah (college-age singing choir) at Christmas or during the summer. This is one of the goals of the Micah ministry—to keep young adults connected to the church while they are in college, so they will have friends and connections still intact when they return.

## **Intergenerational choir**

Joining a variety of ages into one choir can be a rewarding experience for all, but it isn't for everyone. When adults and youth or children ring together, members will need to have a healthy dose of understanding, empathy, and patience for each other. Expectations will need to be adjusted based on the experience and capabilities of the individuals. For example, children or youth will bring a level of energy and activity to a group that some adults may find distracting or even annoying. However, it is sometimes just these differences that make an intergenerational choir so much fun.

Even joining diverse ages together for a one time choir can be fun. Ideas such as a special choir including family members all together could be a great experience that ringers will long remember. During summer, parents and youth or children could join together to learn a piece for the 4th of July or for Back to School or Rally Day. Use this idea to start things off, and new or additional ringing ensembles could seed the new choir with the intergenerational choir members.

## **Open house**

Many ideas abound for offering a hands-on, "come and meet us and try ringing" experience, such as an open house event. Scheduling in conjunction with a popular event, either before or after, might offer good exposure, or maybe you want to highlight only your event by scheduling it totally unopposed to others. Either way here are some thoughts:

- Highlight that it is a “no obligation” time to come and check out what ringing is all about. Once there, you will offer a “Learn to Ring” class, again with a short time commitment and no obligation to join the choir. People are sometimes hesitant to try ringing because, if they don’t like it or fear it’s too difficult, they don’t want to disappoint you later by backing out. Save them that concern by making it “no obligation.”
- Include experienced ringers as greeters and helpers, to make it feel like an event. If only one person comes, and it’s you and that person sitting there staring at each other, it doesn’t feel very fun, so extra people will add to the party feeling. Gather in small groups and just ring up and down the notes, experimenting with the bells. Show the visitor some simple bell music and talk about the team aspect of ringing (and the fun). Maybe have a DVD of the group to show, pictures, etc., to generate interest.
- It’s your choice whether people come and go or arrive for a scheduled program of some kind. Just be clear in your invitation, so people know what to expect.
- Consider holding the open house at the same time as your rehearsal, so you’ll know the attendees are likely to have this time free. You could also hold it at a time convenient to people at church, such as immediately follow a service or other big event, or during children’s choir while parents are free.
- Keep your time together short, upbeat, and high energy, and plan the experience to be a positive one where everyone leaves feeling successful. It’s the first contact, and it may be your only chance to get someone hooked, so make sure they leave feeling good.
- Consider providing snacks. Food is always a welcome addition to any gathering because it provides a little down time to just visit and get acquainted in a relaxed atmosphere. A

simple cookie and beverage table is a nice touch as folks arrive or at the end of the hour.

- Provide a take-away: A physical connection to ringing is a good way to stay in touch with the interested person, so offer a small flyer, business card, CD of handbell music with your contact information, or something else for their hands when they leave.
- Don't let anyone leave without working out the next step: If they are ready, schedule the "Learn to Ring" class, or give them something with the schedule on it and promise to send them a follow-up reminder. If they are unsure, suggest a timeframe for calling or emailing to see where they are in their level of interest.

## Road trip!

Teens especially enjoy anything where they can just leave home and parents behind and be with their friends. Find a good bell choir to visit, and observe a rehearsal or do a combined event. A concert is a great first step for generating interest, especially if the performing group is also a teen group. Adult ringers don't impress teens very much, but peers do. Adults also enjoy going to a concert and stopping for dessert or dinner before or after the concert. It is inspirational to see what is possible with the instrument in the hands of experienced ringers. If there is a change ringing tower nearby, plan a tower visit, so your ringers can experience the type of ringing that eventually led to handbell ringing.

## Host a guest handbell ensemble

Most likely there is a good church, school, or community choir in your area, or one that is looking for concert venues. Take advantage of any good group you can find by inviting them to perform at your church, preferably at the most visible event you have—at worship or a special upcoming event.



Lay the ground work ahead of time through your constant “sell, sell, sell”—talking it up and finding a way to gather some potential ringers together so they are already thinking about ringing as a possibility. Maybe you invite the ladies group to host a reception for this concert, to be greeters, or to host the ringers’ home stays. Ask the men to come and grill hot dogs or hamburgers for the guest choir’s dinner. Children also make great ushers, and teens are great set up helpers—they love toting handbell stuff around even when they don’t know what’s inside of all those cases. A moment or two of one-on-one time with the ringers unpacking bells, and kids and teens are entranced! Try to involve as many non-ringing people in the concert as possible to give them the chance to be invested in the concert, meet the ringers personally, and to start to envisioning what ringing offers. Plus, you’ve generated a built-in audience!

## Boys ONLY bells

This concept was successful for us when we hit a point when our children’s groups were missing boys. I offered a six-week class for one hour on Sunday afternoons for boys ONLY, no girls allowed! (I emphasized that girls were welcome at the other rehearsals, but it was only boys for this event.) It was six classes of Choirchime® and handbell basics, learning to ring, and interesting trivia and rhythm games. I had 16 boys from grades four through six. They were one of my best groups ever—super enthusiastic and very energetic—but they learned to be very careful and even rang the bells for one rehearsal with great respect and care, no clanks at all. We ended the last class by sharing everything we learned and ringing a couple of simple songs. Although all the boys did not join in the fall, we had a great turnout, and I considered it a great success. I would definitely do it again; if I could I’d get a dad to be director, it could be ALL boys.

- Target a missing population in your program and create a specialty choir or experience for them.
- Focus on a short commitment; 6 to 8 weeks.
- Plan a culminating event: perform for parents, worship,



event, or video—an enticing purpose for the group.

- It must be FUN mixed with learning; hopefully they won't see the difference.
- Have simple, basic goals geared to gain their interest and produce a feeling of success.

## **#1 best recruitment tool ever**

Some years ago, I asked Carla David of First United Methodist Church (Round Rock, Texas) about her "Learn to Ring" class and her recruiting secret for her amazing number of ringers and bell choirs. She said, "The Learn to Ring Class IS my best recruitment tool. Once I get them into the class, ringers almost always will join." How about that? If you do a good job getting people to just come and try ringing in a non-threatening, no-obligation atmosphere, the chances are very good that they will go on and join your group. I think I already knew that, as it was an approach I was also using, but I was thinking maybe there was more I wasn't doing. So, our job is to

1. generate interest in what we do
2. help people see themselves as capable, having fun and doing something worthwhile by ringing
3. get them to the "Learn to Ring" class, either in a group or one-on-one

## **Ideas to inspire your creativity**

- Teach a short community/parks and recreation class that may create interest in ringing and in joining your church group.
- Host a concert of a well-known bell choir, and include a reception to mingle with potential ringers. Have a display/information about your program highlighted and your ringers present and wearing group shirts as greeters.
- Try "Welcome Notes," a small ensemble (or a large one!) in unexpected places around your church, ringing easily





recognizable tunes before/after services. Have a friendly, knowledgeable, non-ringing or directing person on-hand to talk and hand out information (maybe about your Learn to Ring class). Choose easy music, so ringers can be more engaging with passersby. We've rung on the church side-way, the large entry into the sanctuary, the hallways, and fellowship hall.

- Christmas Eve caroling, Easter, other big events - Use current ringers as a core and invite anyone interested to ring carols using Ardis Freeman's Ring Along Songs (no music reading) or other simple, non-reading way to ring. Advertise highly that no experience, practice, or obligation is required. They can just show up, ring some carols, and then go to service. It's a great way to greet members and visitors coming into the church on Christmas Eve or Easter. And, it requires little planning.
- Host a Guild "Learn to Ring" event - In our area, the "Rookie Ringer" classes sponsored by our Guild Area are planned in various locations throughout the Area. So volunteer to host one! It's easy and will make a great opportunity for your potential or your newbie ringers to get some extra, targeted training right in their own backyard. This makes it easy for people to attend in their own church. It will also help build community for your ringers as they work together in greeting and hosting. It's easy because the Area folks do all the real planning and teaching. Just check it out. (You may want to offer an intro class so that your new ringers arrive feeling prepared to have a review of the basics, ready to move beyond "how to pick up and ring the bell.")

### **Recruitment publicity**

Frankly, I've found the challenge with recruiting publicity to be the fact that every year we need more ringers, and we are basically trying to convey the same ideas year to year. So, just to save my sanity, I try to



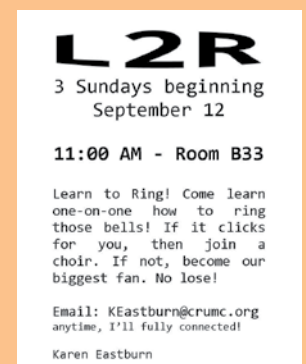
mix it up by finding a fun way to advertise our handbell ministry and make it seem fresh.

### Graphics/images should be:

- Engaging to your target ages
- Showing current photos whenever possible
- Displaying recognizable people/popular youth in the church that might help sell the idea (We have been fortunate over the past years to have several pastors ring with us, for example.)
- Illustrating your past successes: great concerts, performing in worship, mission concerts, etc.

Inspiration: I take an idea from a piece of music, from something a ringer has said, or from scripture to inspire a publicity theme or a Learn to Ring class:

1. Just Ring It
2. Ready to Ring? (RU Ready? For kids)
3. Back to Bells
4. Handbell Infusion (infuse your life with music and ringing)
5. Brownies and Bells – kick-off event
6. Sight-Read Sunday – preview of music for fall with added L1 pieces for current ringers and anyone who wanted to check us out (We got one new ringer from this, which I consider a success.)
7. Nuts 'n Bolts of Ringing, Handbell Nuts 'n Bolts
8. L2R (Learn to Ring)
9. HBU (Handbell University) weeks: Freshman, Sophomore, etc., for each class.)
10. Make Music in Your Heart (ministry-wide)
11. Fall in Love with Ringing - I followed up the previous #11 in January/February before Valentine's Day; the idea be-





Watch the Ring Out Loud slide show.



**Praise + Passion = Music!**



Download the Fellowship in Ringing brochure.



ing music comes from the heart, doing something nice for yourself and others.

12. Ring Out Loud – our ministry theme continues in our recruitment publicity. This year I made a slide show using quotes from ringers about what “ROL” means to them and sent it out to all the children.
13. Feed My Sheep – a church-wide call for members to commit themselves to all ministries based on John 21:17.p
14. Dip Into Handbells – it’s cool, refreshing and you just need to jump right in! (Kick-off event was chips and dips for youth.)
15. Bronze Invasion/Bronze Attack – the bells are coming! A youth invitation for fall.
16. Fellowship in Ringing (you can guess the inspiration here; this one lends itself to emphasizing the relationships built through ringing.) used as a handbell ministry brochure for visitors.
17. Share the Power – “Share the power music has to bring us closer to God and to each other.” Share the power of music: Music, Faith, Fellowship.
18. Passion+Praise=Music! Bring your passion for Christ and his church to praise Him using music.
19. Lift High Your Bells – text adapted from the hymn “Lift High the Cross”. Theme for recruitment in conjunction with #18 above. [18\_Lift High Your Bells]
20. Fall Round Up - church-wide Rally Day using a western theme; perfect for us in Texas.

### Newsletter or church paper articles

- Image - Include a picture, always, of the author ringing, of a group, or something to draw the reader in.
- Articles - Again I believe personal accounts of what someone has experienced in handbell ministry are more engaging than a generic “please come ring with us, you’re

invited, more ringers needed” theme. (See “Why I Love Handbells article)

- Short and to the point - People are not as inclined to stop and read the newsletter as they used to be, so make it brief.
- Launching point - A really good personal story can offer the inspiration for the rest of your publicity, such as my ringer who wrote, "I can sing with my hands!" She said a lot more, but that was the phrase that stuck with me. Another ringer said, "...a handbell choir has 16 hands and one heart!"

## Multimedia

Depending upon what capabilities you have available, make a video with ringing and voice-overs, etc., or create Facebook posts, email blasts, local paper articles, posters, flyers, or business cards infused with your recruiting theme. You can even make your own business or sharing card for your ringers to pass out, including the theme you've chosen as a starting point for them to talk with others. Basically, whatever technology you have available to you, use it.

### Lifetime of ringing

Don't discount the opportunity of posting your open spots for ringers on the Guild's website under "Lifetime of Ringing - Find and Post Openings for Ringers" (<http://handbellmusicians.org/membership/member-resource-center/>). This resource is one we are trying to get off the ground, so the more people use it, the more ringers will come to see it as a resource in finding choirs to join. Also, most Guild area websites offer postings for "ringers needed": It's free and connects you to handbell musicians in your area.

## Assimilate that new ringer

[Assimilate is defined as “to absorb into the culture or mores of a population or group.”] maybe this could be a callout?

Download the sample "Why I Love Handbells" article

Download sample  
newsletter articles



Download the youth  
slide show Power-  
Point presentation



presenting a new season for

## Galatians Youth Handbell Choir

of Cedar Rapids, Iowa • [www.galatiandebts.org](http://www.galatiandebts.org)

**First Year, September 8, 2014 - Friday 4:00 to 5:00**

**Nonprofit:** 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, non-religious (debts is a secular organization)  
**Not-501(c)(3):** Not for-profit, but funds are used for religious purposes. (your choice)  
**Not-501(c)(3) not:** religious, non-religious, or secular (your choice)

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**Handbell Choir**

Handbells and bells are used in churches and other religious settings to enhance the worship service. Handbell choirs are a unique and beautiful way to worship.

**Handbell Choir** is a group of people who play handbells and bells in churches and other religious settings. Handbell choirs are a unique and beautiful way to worship.

I didn't used to like the word assimilation when it was used at church in connection with new members. It just doesn't sound fun or nice. But after the Borg in Star Trek made it kind of cool to be assimilated, that word has taken on new meaning for me. If you desire to be a part of a group, don't you want to be assimilated? To be connected to one another, to have a common purpose and goal and, to some extent, become the same, at least in terms of what you are working toward?

I've already alluded to the best way to help a new ringer assimilate or to absorb into culture of the group—one-on-one meetings with you, the director. She could meet with another patient, experienced ringer, but there's an advantage to the director becoming familiar with the new ringer. Knowing the person's experience, skill, and comfort level will help you be sensitive to how far to push the new ringer. Plus, it is the perfect time to establish what ringing style you prefer, how you want techniques executed, and your preferences on other ringing elements.

### **Sink or swim**

I believe that it is a huge mistake to just bring someone in, hand them a bell, and say "ring it this way" and "stop the sound by pressing the bell into your shoulder" and "oh, yeah, when you see this little mark, strike the bell into the foam like this." Or, in the middle of the piece, to holler out, "I forgot to tell you 'LV' means don't damp!" WHAT?? Overwhelmed is how most people will feel! Don't do this to someone if they say they've never rung before. The different language, the unknown techniques, and apparent "inside" knowledge is the kind of thing that separates new ringers from the other members of the choir. You need time to instill the "inside secrets" by meeting on-on-one so the new ringer will not feel ostracized by being the only one who doesn't know all the handbell skills. I see no substitute for this meeting; it quite simply needs to happen so your new ringer can stay afloat with confidence.

## Position for success

Secondly, if your new ringer is brand new to ringing, you will want to choose the ringing assignment carefully. Some things to consider:

- Past music experience - If the person played an instrument, putting them in the same staff range as their instrument can be beneficial for tracking their notes.
- Physical limitations - Some folks can't ring heavy bells for physical reasons, and others have sensitive hearing and can't handle upper bells.
- Mentally ring through a potential ringing position to identify what skills and challenges it may present. Look for and either avoid or plan around:
  - Syncopated rhythms, sixteenth notes or other difficult to execute rhythms
  - Transitions from ringing to other techniques
  - Bell changes, bell to chime changes
  - Exposed sections where they will feel "out there and alone"
  - Independent rhythms, where the ringer has a rhythm different than all others
  - Sparse parts where the ringer plays infrequently
  - Notes that are buried in thick chords making tracking difficult

All of these potentially challenging situations will need to be taught or avoided, but awareness is the first step in choosing a part.

If possible, choose a part that is:

- Busy, the busier the better! To learn tracking and rhythm, busyness helps.
- Easy to track, in order of my preference: B4C5 or D5E5 depending on which staff they are comfortable reading.

Next best is G4A4 and F5G5 (after that the notes tend to be harder to track and I'd avoid them). These are easy to track, don't stick out in sound as much as higher trebles and are not overly heavy for a new ringer.

- Sharing rhythms with other ringers as opposed to independently ringing a rhythm alone
- Repetitious for quicker learning and success
- Not position #11 (B6C7) - Although many directors stick their new person here, this position typically doesn't ring enough, and it really sticks out in sound if the person is lost. Usually the notes are so sparse a new ringer has difficulty not getting lost unless they have very good music reading skills. Still, this position is usually not the one that will sell how fun ringing is!

A note on bell sharing: If the easy tracking parts also include accidentals that would be more than the new ringer can handle, give one away to that ringer who never has enough to do. We all have one, and you know who that is. So far, I haven't had anyone mind when I tell them, "don't worry about the C#5 someone else is playing it"; usually the new ringer is relieved. (Maybe reassign the accidental to the ringer playing position #11 who doesn't have enough to do?)

Communicate with the new ringer about your plans to assimilate him into the group so that he can see that you will not put him in a spot where he will be uncomfortable or fail. People are very sensitive about feeling that they let the group down if they can't ring a part given to them. The most important factor is guaranteeing his success by giving him the skills needed and a part within his capabilities.

### **Shadowing or doubling a part**

If you are fortunate and have duplicate bells, letting the new ringer shadow or double a part takes away a lot of the pressure for the new person. They don't even need to play all the accidentals if they aren't ready for bell changes. This is the best way to assimilate a new ringer

into a group because you can do it gradually. Choose the partner carefully so that the two ringers' personalities will mesh well. It's worth it to save up and buy duplicate bells in the spot you need them the most: for us it was #4 ( B4C5) because the organ sat between this position and #5, and sharing the C#/Db5 was problematic at times.

### **More table time**

Other ringing opportunities that get the new ringer behind the table more will definitely be a plus. A person with a child in your young ringer choir could help out in the children's rehearsal, maybe even ringing a part for an absent child. I have had many adults say it was great because they learned the basics of ringing and had a review of reading music right along with the kids. If you have more than one choir or a neighboring choir available, use the new person as a substitute. The more they ring, the more comfortable and capable they will feel.

A bit of time, understanding, and patience will contribute to new ringer success. By carefully choosing and adapting music and ringing position to a new ringer's skills, he or she will have every opportunity to feel they are a contributing member and to assimilate into your ringing ensemble.



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