



Practical Resources for Handbells in Worship

Ideas, Activities, and Resources

Handbells are a flexible and engaging musical resource – even (and especially) in smaller churches. Whether you're working with a full ensemble, a handful of ringers, ringers of all ages or just looking for something fresh to enhance worship, there are countless creative ways to incorporate handbells meaningfully into your church's life.

This QuickSheet offers ideas for hands-on activities, simple worship formats, and go-to resources to get you started or inspired.

Hands-On Ideas That Work

1. Queens and Rounds

Introduce your group to **change ringing**, a centuries-old tradition of ringing bells in mathematical patterns rather than traditional melodies.

- Start with a one-octave set in any key (more octaves = more ringers).
- Alternate between two "Queens" and two "Rounds":
 - **Queens:** 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8
 - **Rounds:** 1-3-5-7 2-4-6-8
- This exercise builds rhythmic precision, teamwork, and listening skills.
- Can be adapted for ringers holding one or two bells.
→ [Learn more about change ringing on Wikipedia](#)

2. Processionals

Simple processionals can make a powerful visual and auditory impact in worship.

- Teach by rote—no need to read music.
- Add chimes, octave doubling, or percussion for texture.
- Perform them as a true processional down the aisle, or from a stationary location.
→ [Sample processionals available at Ashley Danyew's website](#)

3. Chord-Based Hymn Accompaniments

Hymns with simple, repetitive harmonic structures can be beautifully supported by handbells using a chordal approach.

- Assign bells based on which chord(s) they're part of.
- Each ringer plays when their bell is in the chord being played.

- Use chord numbers for easier learning (e.g., 1 = E \flat major, 2 = A \flat major, etc.).

Sample Chord Map for *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*

- **Chords used:**

- 1 = E \flat / G / B \flat 2 = A \flat / C / E \flat
- 3 = B \flat / D / F 4 = A / C / E \flat

- **Chord progression (half-note rhythm):**

- 1 1 1 3 / 1 1 3 1
1 1 1 3 / 1 1 3 1
1 1 2 3 / 1 1 4 3 3
1 1 1 3 / 1 1 3 1

- Assign bells based on chord membership. Here's a sample lineup (adaptable to your ringers):

- Pam – E \flat 5 & E \flat 6 (plays in chords 1, 2, 4)
- Sarah – G5 & G6 (chord 1)
- Mark – B \flat 5 & B \flat 6 (chords 1, 3)
- Chuck – C5 & C6 (chords 2, 4)
- Sam – D5 & D6 (chord 3)
- Angie – F5 & F6 (chord 3)

Go-To Resources

Technique & General Instruction

- **Healthy Ringing for Handbells and Handchimes** – Susan Berry -- [Link](#)
- **Basic Training for Bells** – Venita MacGorman -- [Link](#)
- **Learning to Ring Series** – Janet Van Valey & Susan Berry
 - [Director's Manual](#)
 - [Using Handchimes](#)
 - [Standard Hymns](#)

Simple Pieces for Small or Beginning Choirs

- **Five Easy Settings (5 by 5)** – Douglas E. Wagner -- [Link](#)
- **Ready to Ring – Christmas Edition** – (Series includes others) -- [Link](#)
- **Hymns for Handbells** – Michael Burkhardt -- [Link](#)
- **All Things Bright and Beautiful** – Cathy Mocklebust -- [Link](#)

- **Ring-A-Story Series** – Tammy Waldrop
Search for “Ring-A-Story” on Handbellworld.com – Try *Noah and the Ark*, *Moses and the Perfect Ten*, *Jonah and the Whale*

Resources for 6 or Fewer Ringers

- **The Creative Use of Handbells in Worship** – Hal H. Hopson
 - [Volume 1](#)
 - [Volume 2](#)
- **All Praise to Thee** – Jason W. Krug
 - [Volume 1](#)
 - [Volume 2](#)
 - [Volume 3](#)
- **Ashley Danyew’s Handbell Resources**
ashleydanyew.com/music – includes processional and more

Bonus Tool: Handbell Music Search Assistant

Search by octave, difficulty, season, ensemble size, and more:

[Handbell Music Search Assistant](#)

Final Thoughts

Small churches have the freedom to be flexible, creative, and deeply personal in their music ministries. Handbells are a perfect fit – offering beauty, interactivity, and opportunities for multigenerational participation. Try one new idea at a time, and watch your ringers grow in confidence and joy.

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