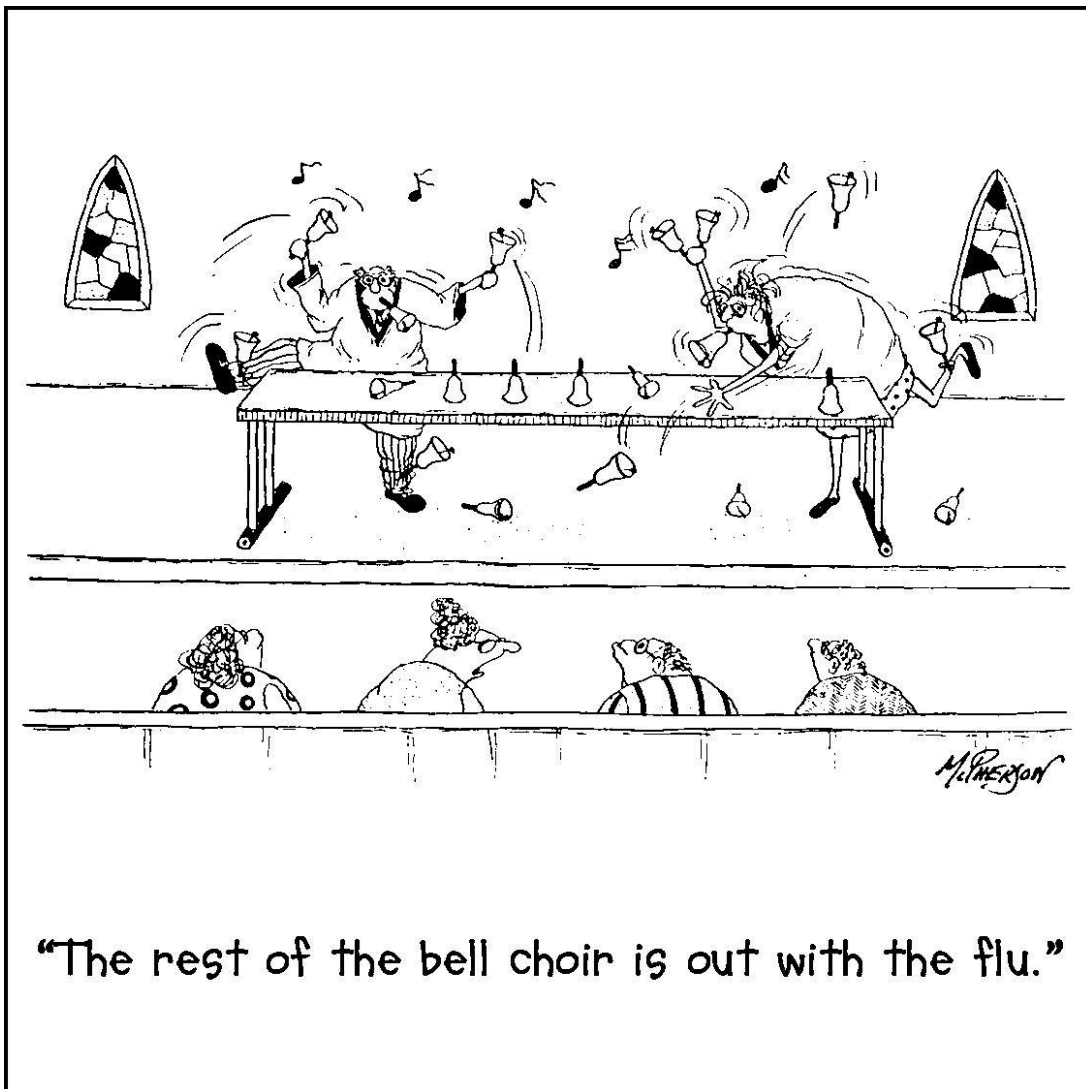


## Doing More With Less – Ringing Musically with Fewer Ringers

Sarah Hazel

As handbell musicians, we are in a unique position when it comes to attendance by our ringers. We don't typically have the luxury of having more than 1 person on a position, so we need all hands on deck to perform a given piece of music.

What happens when we lose a ringer or when 4 people are going to be out of town the week we're supposed to play? It often involves a lot of tears (or adult words!), but then we re-group and sometimes a complete change in plans.



Here are some ideas to help with those instances. With a little planning, it is possible to do more with fewer ringers.

Some suggestions:

1. Pull back and play chords for an accompaniment to the hymns in a service. This works really well with beginning groups to get them started too. Just determine the chords for the piece and write them out. Or color code the words to show when the chord changes and which chord it changes to. Then teach each ringer who is able to ring that day which colors they are supposed to ring on. Voila!
2. Bring in another instrument to play the melody and accompany them on the bells. Just be sure you can transpose the part for the instrumentalist if their instrument isn't in the Key of C.
3. Alternatively, use a keyboard to play the accompaniment (or the bass line) and let the bells play the melody (or treble) line. There is an added benefit here because the keyboard playing the bass line or accompaniment helps the ringers stay grounded when their part is exposed,
4. Re-arrange the piece to be played by fewer ringers. Or find the same title written for fewer ringers. There are a TON of 6, 8, 12, and 16 bell pieces out there since the pandemic. Here are 2 lists that were started by Karen Laflin Carlisle during lockdown:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ZWv5gbtV4jGiYsEagojgDy-4NmPoZZQv/edit#gid=1434561038> and:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17DaHQOJwNWJfJzd4mmN-sIZy74rOtB1ecC69VKMRL-A/edit#gid=1900351151>

Please note, these lists probably haven't been updated recently and there is much more to look for since the pandemic hit. Other sites to look on include the Jeffers Music Assistant, Choraegus.com (note the spelling) or LarryandCarla.com. Also check out more recent publications from Grassy Meadow Music (Jason Krug), The Small But Mighty series from Hope Publishing as well as The Small-ER but Mighty series from the same publisher. Beckenhorst also 4 collections of 12-bell pieces.

5. Look for smaller ensemble arrangements of a particular piece. Even Flight of the Bumblebee has a quartet version written for it! If you find a small ensemble version of the piece, there's nothing that says more ringers can't play it. Turn a trio into a 6-ringer piece. The sky is the limit!
6. If you have a ringer who has a particular strength, use it! Try playing the melody line on a bell tree and having the rest of the piece covered by the choir. (This may take duplicate bells to make this happen). Alternatively, play it on cymbells if you have access to a set.

Or let that one ringer who loves to do solos play the melody line on the bells and accompany them with chimes.

7. Change the piece so it can be played entirely with mallets. Often 1 ringer can cover extra bells when done this way.
8. Reassign the parts. Eliminate Position 11 and have the Position 7 and 8 ringers pick up the B6/7 and C7/8. This works best if those positions know how to ring at least 4-in-hand, but the uppermost bells can also be re-assigned elsewhere to other ringers if needed since they often play only a few times in the piece. If the bass line is easier, re-assign those lowest bells or accidentals to other ringers in the choir.
9. If all else fails, choose a piece with thicker chords and eliminate some of the notes from the chord. Always be sure you have the root and the fifth in the chord in order to make it sound as full as possible. (This allows the overtones of the bells to work FOR you to make the chord sound bigger than it is.)

Here are some other suggestions from a previous class I took on places to find music for fewer bells (There's no name on the class notes so I can't give proper credit here):

### **Some Suggestions for Repertoire for Fewer Bells/Ringers**

[www.choraegus.com](http://www.choraegus.com) Larry Sue has a large number of selections for 8, 12 and 16 bells. Titles are sold individually. 8 bells are G5–G6, 12 bells either C5 to G6 or F5 to C7.

[www.sonologymusic.com](http://www.sonologymusic.com) Use the search engine and select "12 Bells" (sold individually).

Twelve Bells & Twelve Bells +1 (Patricia Sanders Cota) from Hope Publishing. Multiple collections cover worship (traditional and contemporary), Americana, spirituals, weddings, Lent/Easter & Christmas. 12 (C5 to G6) and 13 bells (C5 to A6).

Ring with 6 (Martha Lynn Thompson) from Hope Publishing. Multiple collections cover worship (traditional and contemporary), classics, year-round selections, Lent/Easter & Christmas. Range varies: 14-19 bells from a 3 octave set

Less than a Full Choir (various) from Cantabile Press. Multiple volumes cover worship (traditional and contemporary), Lent/Easter and Christmas. Generally 12 to 14 bells, treble clef.

...in F Major (various) from Choristers Guild. Collections (spirituals, Christmas, hymns, praise) for 12 bells (F5 to C7)

Five or Less (Bob Burroughs) from Lorenz. Four volumes of short selections (originals and arrangements) in a limited range which can be rung with a maximum of five ringers, number varies by selection.

Four Ringer Handbell Collections (James Kimball) from Kimball Publishing. A series of 14 collections covering worship, folk tunes, Christmas, and secular. Eight bells, all treble clef.

Hand in Glove (Gary Smoke) from High Meadow Music Publishing. Four books for 11 to 18 bells covering hymns, Christmas, and Americana.

Mayola Music (now sold by Handbell Ringers of Great Britain) has a large number of books of selections of music for 12 bells and more. Many are arranged by Guy Ratcliffe.