

You have your handbells and/or handchimes and you're ready to start your choir. Here is a list of the other things you need or will want to consider as essential tools for a successful handbell program.

<b>NEED</b>	<b>FOR CONSIDERATION</b>
Membership in the Guild	Split-back Music Binders
Committed Ringers	3/8" 3-hole punch
Tables & Foam Pads	Music Risers or Floor Stands
Music	Gloves
Tool Kit	Individual Ringer Supply Kits
Cleaning Cloths/Polish	Web listing of your choir
Mallets	Optional Instrumentation

### You NEED a Handbell Musicians of America Membership

Membership in the Guild gives you access to countless benefits and resources that will help your program to thrive.

### You NEED committed ringers

Coaches of team sports expect regular attendance at most, if not all, practices and games. Theatrical directors expect regular attendance at rehearsals and shows. Handbell and handchime choirs are no different. So, while of course "life happens," setting your standards from the beginning can go a long way towards ensuring the continuity of your choir.

### You NEED tables and foam pads

Generally speaking, 3 octaves of handbells need tables which measure 24' in length and 30" in width. Many groups use plastic tables to start. Banquet tables normally measure 48, 60, 72 or 96" long by 30" wide. Some groups purchase specially-made handbell tables. There are a variety of styles and prices. Pragmatic issues like frequent breakdown, transporting and set-up often make size and weight important factors. Rectangular or trapezoidal tables are usually 30x36". The table heights vary from 30-32" and some have adjustable legs for even more variation. So, before purchasing, we suggest you compare. One great way to "comparison shop" is to attend a handbell festival to hear about and see what others are doing. The Handbell Industry Council (HIC) is usually on site with displays. You can also visit the HIC Buyers Guide on our website for a list of companies that sell tables.

Foam padding is a necessity for the handbell table. Products vary in thickness (2" to 4") and density; experimentation and research will assist you in determining what you need. While this

is a personal preference to some degree, the thickness and the density contribute to control of the bells on the table and affect the sound of the bell when certain techniques, such as plucking, martellato, and damping, are used. You should also get covers for your foam pads/tables.

### You NEED music to play—of course

There are hundreds and thousands of pieces published for handbell choirs of all sizes and difficulty levels. Music is available from handbell publishers and music retailers for use in worship, in schools, and in the community. Visit the HIC Buyers Guide for a complete list of sources for your handbell choir.

### You NEED a tool kit

Handbells and handchimes require regular maintenance to stay in optimum playing condition. Each handbell/handchime manufacturer offers complete tool kits and instructions for handling the basic maintenance on your instrument. For more than basic adjustments and maintenance, you should contact your manufacturer.

### You NEED polishing cloths to keep your bells looking nice

Handbells need regular cleaning to avoid staining and permanent oxidation. Handbell suppliers offer a selection of metal polishes and polishing cloths that can quickly remove most stains/moisture spots. It's a good habit to quickly clean your bells by wiping them down with a clean polishing cloth after every use. Consult your manufacturer's guidelines for recommended cleaning and polishing practices to insure your warranty is not impacted.

### You NEED mallets

Each ringer needs a minimum of 2 mallets. Much of the music available for handbells today calls for passages where mallets are required to get the sound desired by the composer/arranger. It is very important that you select the correct mallet for the correct bell. Mallets are made in varying sizes and levels of hardness, and each is designed for a specific range of bells. Manufacturers and suppliers produce matched sets of mallets: the size of the mallet corresponds to the size of the bell and, in some cases, the tone we desire. Experimentation is a must when purchasing mallets. Side-by-side comparison is best, if possible. The size and density of the mallet has a definite relationship to the tone each bell will produce.

Malleting technique is VERY important, not only for producing the best sound, but also in protecting the instrument from damage. Mallets that are too hard, strikes that are overzealous, and striking the bell in the waist (the thinnest part of the casting) may result in a cracked handbell. When using a mallet, the strike should land where the clapper strikes.

### You May WANT 3 ring music folders and a 3-hole punch

Three-ring, split-back folders (sometimes called presentation folders) may be found at your local office supply house or through most handbell suppliers. These folders have a break across the front and back that allows the folder to hinge and stand alone. Many folders also have an adjustment that allows the folder to be angled more upright or slanted.

These folders require punching holes in the music. Many prefer 3/8" holes rather than 1/4", allowing for freer turns and less tearing of the holes. Adding dividers provides easy access to sections or different programs. This is a great way to organize your music and provide an all-in-one music stand on the table for your members.

## You May WANT music risers or floor stands

Risers elevate the music so ringers may look at their music and still see the director. Handbell suppliers have a large choice of music risers. However, with that said, people can and do get along without them, especially if they've never used them. An argument can be made that risers can block the sound and interfere with the "fascination" of watching the ringers. Some choirs do decide to play with their music nearly flat on the table or by memorizing the music.

## You May WANT gloves.

Many American handbell choirs wear gloves for a better grip, a uniform look, or for a plethora of other reasons. Many British handbell choirs do not wear gloves for a better grip, a uniform look, or for a plethora of other reasons. Funny how those pesky reasons work. Whatever your side, if you decide you want gloves, plain cotton/blend gloves are available. Options include plastic "dots" to afford a better grip and a Velcro wrist strap. There is also a long-lasting neoprene glove, and some ringers (especially those playing "the buckets") use padded gloves to further protect their hands.

## You May WANT personal ringer supply kits

Many directors put together pencil pouches with a set of supplies for each of their members. Pouches made to fit in 3-ring binders are available from office supply stores. Include a pencil, sturdy eraser, sticky tabs or small post-it type notes (which can be used to make notes in music), page turn helpers (such as small clothes pins or paper clips), and other items you think might be helpful during rehearsals.

## A few last thoughts for consideration

Let's assume you already have a set of handbells or handchimes and accessories, and that you have spoken to "the powers that be" (the minister of the church, the principal of the school) about the possibility of a choir (because without their support, your task will be much more difficult). You may have formed a committee to initiate the group and surveyed the population to help enlist ringers and support groups.

The next step is to secure a place to rehearse (and to perform). Bare requirements of space depend upon the tables and size of the group. There must be room for the passage of people on all sides, for handbell cases, for ringers standing behind the tables, and for the director and music stand, as well as adequate space between the tables and the facing wall. A higher ceiling is preferred. Carpeted floors, draped windows and/or walls, acoustical ceilings, and other things that keep reverberation low are helpful or may deaden the sound too much. Sample carpet strips on which the ringers can stand will help reduce fatigue at long rehearsals.

Invite a handbell group, a local or "name" choir, to perform a concert at your location. While this concert entails more work, it is sure to create interest and lasting results. Set a date for an initial "Introduction to Handbell Ringing" meeting, and announce the concert with plenty of lead time. Everyone is welcomed. This is not a tryout. It is an "Introduction to Handbells." Auditions (may) come later.

## A NOTE ON ATTENDING LOCAL, AREA, AND NATIONAL GUILD EVENTS FOR ALL LEVELS OF HANDBELL AND HANDCHIME MUSICIANS

Possible benefits to you and your choir:

- Continuity of your choir from year to year
- Increase in commitment to the choir by ringers
- Increased bond between the ringers in your choir
- Increase in musicality for both ringers and directors
- Increase in skills for musicians at all levels of their development
- Empowerment of your ringers to take responsibility for their art

So, check out the national and Area websites or call the Guild's national offices at 800-878-5459 and make sure you are signed up to receive e-mail newsletters.