

# Motivation of Members

in a Faith-based (or Secular) Setting

by Kathryn Aspenwall



a resource for members of  
**Handbell Musicians**  
OF AMERICA

## **Motivation of Members in a Faith-based (or Secular) Setting**

Copyright ©2012, Kathy Aspenwall

AGEHR, Inc. dba Handbell Musicians of America has been granted a non-exclusive, perpetual license to present the content and information contained herein and retains all exclusive rights to the design, format, and presentation of the content. Members of Handbell Musicians of America may make ONE copy of this resource for their own use and may not distribute the work to any other party.

# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	2
Vertical to Horizontal Approach . . . . .	2
Three Magic Words and a Leadership Challenge . . . . .	3
Resources . . . . .	6
Ice Breakers/Introductions . . . . .	6
Handshake Mill . . . . .	6
Partner Questions . . . . .	6
Covenants . . . . .	7
Games. . . . .	10
Name Game . . . . .	10
Have You Ever . . . . .	10
Categories Game. . . . .	11
7/11/21 Game . . . . .	11
GLOB Game. . . . .	12
Hula Hoop Circle Game. . . . .	12
Communication . . . . .	13
Devotions and Prayer Time. . . . .	13
Does it Work? . . . . .	13
Frequently Asked Questions . . . . .	14

# Introduction

---

Having spent 10 years working with teachers at summer institutes, it was always impressive to see how groups bonded together through team-building activities and in an atmosphere that promoted safe expression. This fellowship promoted significant achievement in the formation of a vision and/or goals in an educational setting. Translating this to our music ensembles, one soon discovers that, as members relate to each other personally, they enjoy their experience more, resulting in better attendance and increased interest in making music together. This personal investment provides the vehicle to promote both musical and spiritual growth. Included here are some personal examples that give credence to the practical application of team building, morale, attitude, and skills, as well as the resources to get you started.

## **Vertical to Horizontal Approach**

Leadership philosophy has changed significantly in the last 20 years, and this change underlies our relationship with motivating members. As a beginning teacher in 1970, I was taught two fundamental truths: “Don’t smile until Christmas” and “Keep the desk between you and your students.” This philosophy shaped my classroom management, idea of education, and possibly survival in the maze of “beginning teacher” problems. To be fair, I did not learn this philosophy in my formal education; I garnered it from other experienced teachers. It was definitely a vertical approach, where I was the boss and my students were there to do as I asked. My other experience in the professional world was that of a symphonic musician where, once again, I came in, played my part, did exactly what the director asked, and didn’t ask questions. As a beginning teacher, I assumed my primary function was to present material, provide opportunities for students, and make corrections.



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.

Years later, I began leadership training to be a facilitator and presenter for the West Virginia Center for Professional Development. One of the concepts we developed was having participants make their own “covenants.” We were taught to promote dialogue, use brainstorming sessions, and value opinions without making judgments. This changed my leadership style, viewpoint, and philosophy. Instead of the vertical approach mentioned above, I used a horizontal approach, enabling everyone to have a voice and role in shaping their ensemble, class, group, staff, etc. Participants were encouraged to share ideas and experiences without a value judgment being placed upon them. It was a safe place to talk and share. Those ideas are used in all of my music ensembles today. Below are some benefits of this horizontal approach:

- Allows participants to shape their group’s destiny
- Fosters openness and cooperation
- Increases bonding and friendship with each other
  - Attendance is increased because members WANT to be at rehearsal
- Heightens musical awareness
  - Value of the ensemble is awakened.
- Eases recruitment
  - Others want what they see—to have a personal connection with other people
  - Ensemble membership grows

One of the most rewarding aspects of my position now is to watch this atmosphere of trust, care, concern, love, and prayer evolve. Rehearsals have changed from sometimes being tiring and frustrating to being exhilarating and fun. We are connected personally, musically, and spiritually, without having to be each other’s best friend.

### **Three Magic Words and a Leadership Challenge**

My present position as associate director of music at North Raleigh United Methodist Church is the most rewarding one I’ve ever had. I’m

very fortunate to have a “job” that isn’t a job—it’s a passion. I’m also very blessed to have Michael Glasgow (a name many of you know) as a boss. What you might not know is that my boss is younger than both of my children. We have a fantastic team that is based on trust and respect. We also have had lots of fun with our three magic words, “You Are Right.” It’s fun to joke about and be able to really admit the other person is right.

In any personal and family relationship, the majority would say “I Love You” are the three magic words. That’s easy. It’s reinforced all the time. So here’s my challenge. What are the first three words that come into your mind to describe your own leadership role or style? There aren’t any right or wrong answers, so don’t think about it; just write down the first three words that pop into your head. The purpose is to *understand ourselves as leaders*. Before we start presenting goals and team-building ideas to our members, we need to identify our own feelings about our role. Will those feelings change over time? Let’s hope so, as times change and we open ourselves to new ideas. Now take a look at your words—what do they tell you about yourself? Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, only an opportunity to look introspectively. Without agonizing or spending more than a few moments, make sure these thoughts are written down before reading any further.

To provide another example of using “three magic words,” I asked our Pastor, Joe Wilburn, what his three words were. He replied, “small, medium, and large.” Shocked? I was. But here is his explanation. Picture yourself with three boxes. You have a small, medium, and large box in which to place (symbolically) everything in your whole life.

- The **SMALL** box is the most important one because you can take it with you everywhere. You place in it what is utterly essential for all you are and all you do. In this box, Rev. Wilburn places two things: his relationship with God (including the means to pursue this) and his relationship with people. This box includes activities like prayer, kindness, and consideration of others. Outwardly, it includes

God's Word, which he has in his heart and in the pocket Bible he always carries. Inwardly, it includes the attitude of making sure he stays close to God and lives at peace with all people.

- The **MEDIUM** box is larger and not as easy to carry, so you cannot always take it with you. In this box, Rev. Wilburn puts his most important tasks and what he does. This includes his work, family, friendships, etc. Physically, these ideas don't fit in a box, but they exist symbolically; these are items that one can manage most of the time.
- The **LARGE** box is the "everything else" box. It would include your hobbies, things you like, preferences, TV, news, etc. This box holds what is leftover.

Rev. Wilburn believes what we choose to place in these boxes determines the kind of person we are and the way we will act. It sets our priorities. Many are unsure of how to prioritize, which often results in inward conflict. Conflict can also result from placing things in the wrong box. If this happens, the obvious choice is to take whatever is in the wrong box and put it in the right box.

Using these three words, think about what we, as handbell directors, put in our small box and medium box. Maybe it would be interesting to ask our players what they put in their small and medium boxes? What can we have with us all the time? This is just another visual aid to focus on priorities.

If you're wondering, my three leadership words were "love, inspire, and grow," but I honestly wish I could say that two were "prayer and humility." As a beginning teacher, "control" would definitely have been one of my words. We all have the ability and opportunity to be lifelong learners and grow in our leadership roles and style.

# Resources

---

Let's get practical. Does it really matter what one's leadership style is or how one is perceived? After 40 years of teaching and ministry, I believe emphatically that it does. Below are categories of activities to build ensembles by building people.

- Ice Breakers/Introductions
- Covenants
- Charts
- Games
- Communication
- Devotions and Prayer Time

You are not expected to do all of these. Just choose the ones that would best adapt to your groups' personality and needs. While written here for a faith-based setting, everything except the devotions section is completely adaptable to any community or educational group.

## **Ice Breakers/Introductions**

### **Handshake Mill**

Play some upbeat music in the background and have everyone stand. Give them one or two minutes to meet each other, shaking hands and calling each person by name. If not everyone knows each other, it's best to use name tags for this part. If the group is small, shorten the time. The purpose is to energize the group right from the beginning by having them move around. The energy level increases and everyone is relaxed, all in a few minutes.

### **Partner Questions**

1. Find a partner—someone you don't know well or don't usually work with. The person with the shortest hair goes first. Stand facing each other. You have two minutes to describe your favorite room in your house and why OR describe



where you like to go to have quiet time.

2. Change partners. The person with the largest shoes goes first. You have two minutes to describe your favorite hand-bell experience and explain why.
3. Change partners. This time the person with the most colorful outfit goes first. You have two minutes to look 20 years into the future and describe what you'd want your legacy to be OR if you were stranded on an desert island for a week, who is the one person you would want to be with you and why.

Note: Many additional ideas are listed under games. The ones mentioned above are quite short.

## **Covenants**

If you are a new director, let the ensemble know right away that your job is to SERVE (not dictate) and that, before starting, you need some feedback. Right away, you've established a feeling that you want their input, and you want to know their feelings. This approach works with any group, even if it's one that's been together for years. Just start a new year with the objective of allowing the ensemble to have ownership of what is important to them. Make sure everyone feels welcome to speak. Understand that the objectives the group comes up with might not be your objectives. That's all right. You can always revisit them and guide them to a higher level when bonding develops.

Here's a quick personal example of using this technique: When I became director of our Silver Chords (senior vocal ministry), the ensemble consisted of eight singers. At my very first meeting, I started with poster paper and simply asked the members what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go. Six members wanted to improve their vocal skills, become more active, and hopefully gain new members. Two wanted just to sing hymns. Our compromise was to use some hymn tunes, but in choral settings, and to begin working more con-

sistently on choral techniques. It's been less than two years, and the ensemble now numbers 25 and has expanded their goals to include outreach, with both singing and chimes, to senior assisted-living centers, as well as more social activities. In the process, the two members that didn't want to do this resigned from the ensemble, but the positive smiles and commitment of everyone else has more than compensated in both numbers and quality.

### **Here's how to start**

Materials: Dry erase board or poster board (or anything large enough for all to see), markers

### **Guidelines**

- Get ideas from everyone who wishes (don't mandate)
- Stress positive comments
- List everything at first (no value judgment)
- Combine what can be combined
- Prioritize (if necessary)
- Review and ask for questions and or clarification

It's a good idea to try for no more than five statements/ideas, but it's certainly fine to use more. It just becomes more difficult to remember and focus on them.

### **Optional extension**

- Have members evaluate themselves as a group right now on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest. A quick and easy way to do this is to call out numbers starting at one. Stop when you have a majority of hands showing and ask if that is a correct consensus. (Some might not wish to participate, which is fine.)
- Date and mark the number on a chart.
- Revisit as necessary.

## Charts

Try making a chart of what each individual brings to the ensemble:

- Write the first name and their characteristic.
- If anyone has a difficult time thinking of a characteristic for themselves, ask the group to give the characteristic.
- Compile all of them and make a point to say how wonderful each characteristic is while naming them again.

You can also draw a picture of a lattice on poster board. (The lattice is just a “horizontal” example but it can be anything. Try balloons tied together, flowers, interlocking circles, etc.)

- Have each member sign their name and write *why* they are part of the ensemble. These reasons don’t have to be written together; it’s better if they are separated.
- Read all of the “whys” to the entire group, without the names. This builds on positives and will usually be quite varied.

Here’s an approach for broadening well-established groups:

- Draw a rather large, centered circle and then another circle around it, leaving room to write ideas. Provide similar charts for everyone in the ensemble so that each has their own page.
- In the center circle, share celebrations (things the ensemble does well—music, social, etc.)
- In the outside circle, brainstorm how to broaden these successes. Try to build some consensus. Examples could be, “develop more musicality or spiritually,” or “relate to the congregation more.”
- At the top of the paper, allow space for each person to write his/her own individual commitment for the year. These are individual, not to be shared. (Download sample in the sidebar.)



[CLICK HERE](#) to download a sample “Circle Activity” Chart.

## Games

### Name Game

Materials: Anything that can be tossed from person to person, such as small stuffed animals.

Objective: Learn at least two other names

Rules:

- Form a circle.
- Emphasize good tosses and good catches.
- Toss an object to someone across the circle by first saying their name. The recipient says thank you to the person tossing, also by name.
- Establish a pattern and remember this pattern. Everyone gets a turn. The ball ends up at the starting place.
- Repeat the same pattern again, still using names.
- Increase speed.
- Add more objects being tossed, always in the same pattern order.
- Optional: You can eliminate the names after several times, to go faster, but only after each person has heard their own name twice.

### Have You Ever

Materials: Place spots in a circle on the floor, enough for all but one person. Jar openers are the easiest to use for spots and can be purchased at the dollar store. These don't slide. Alternatively, tape down paper spots or just use visible tape.

Rules:

- Everyone finds a place on the spots. Keep the circle large enough to have easy movement. The leader starts in the center.

- The object is to move to a place on the spots. Whoever does not have a place has to move to the center. Explain they will be changing places based on their answer to a question, and they are not allowed to move right next to where they currently are.
- The center person starts by saying: "Have you ever (name an activity)?" This person MUST have done the activity in order to name it. Participants who have also done the activity will move to another non-adjacent spot. Participants who have not will stay where they are. For example, to get everyone to move, say some general, such as, "Have you ever read a book?" Always start with "Have you ever..." The activity can be much more specific, such as "Have you ever been to Africa?" Remember, the center person must have done the activity in order to ask the question.

This is a lot of fun and helps people learn some interesting facts about each other.

### **Categories Game**

This game is just to promote common interest. To play, decide a category, such as a favorite hobby, place to go, number in a family, favorite food, natural hair color, shoe size, etc. Participants can also help develop categories. The participants must then break into new groups based on the category, and then share with the entire group. No one is allowed to be left alone, so the categories may have to be thought of in broader terms. For example, shoe sizes might have to be groups of 6-8, 9-10, etc., instead of specific sizes, or the favorite food might have to be pasta or Italian instead of pizza.

### **7/11/21 Game**

Divide into two or three groups and have three stations for each group. (You can use anything to mark the stations.)

Each group, without talking, uses a “knock, knock, show number of fingers” action (similar to a “rock, paper, scissors” game). Both hands are to be used. When the individual group totals 7, they move to the next station. They must then total 11 to move to the third station, where they must get a total of 21. They then move backwards to 11 and back to 7. You can also do this same activity as one large group.

Hint: Remember the directions say, “without talking.” Someone will soon realize that they can assign numbers (allowed) and the group will move rather quickly. Don’t give it away, just let it happen.

### **GLOB Game**

All participants have five pieces of tape, which they can roll up and stick to their bodies in five different places. You then call out, “Stick.” On the first call of “Stick,” players find a partner and stick together at one *tape site* and move about together for 5-10 seconds. On the next call, pairs join to create foursomes. Continue to call “Stick” until the group becomes a glob.

Note: This isn’t the easiest activity to do and not one I’d start with. It would work better with younger people than seniors.

### **Hula Hoop Circle Game**

Make a circle holding hands. Two players start with their clasped hands through a hula-hoop. The group must move this hoop around the circle without letting go of anyone’s hand. It’s much more fun to add a second hoop going in the opposite direction. Help is allowed and encouraged in this activity.

Hint: Always emphasize that *help is allowed and encouraged*. It can also be used as a debriefing point: Do we ever need help in handbells?

Check the Internet for many more team-building games.

## **Communication**

Building self-esteem and confidence helps ringers to bond even more. Emails, notes, and comments on how well the ensemble is working or improving all go a long way to improving morale. As morale develops, so does the level of performance. An upward spiral is achieved from an atmosphere of trust, patience, and love shown to each other. Most ensembles that have a wide variance in ability and talent. Yet, by promoting a desire to be part of a ringing family, skills improve. As the skills improve, so does the confidence and commitment to the ensemble. The spiral just continues upward.

For more information on communication, see my other resources under this topic.

## **Devotions and Prayer Time**

In a faith-based setting, our primary objective is to serve and worship God. Sharing praises and concerns and having prayer time are of the utmost importance. Even better is to have a devotional time to further participants along the spiritual path. Encourage participants to share personal stories, not just read something. Ultimately, our trust and love of the Lord will provide all the strength and purpose we need. Realistically, as our talents are varied, so are our spiritual journeys. Striving to make a musical offering to God, always envisioning it a part of worship and not a performance, and making music that is felt and played from the heart will promote loving fellowship that can be sensed in the congregation. It's contagious—all of us want to be involved in activities that are fulfilling and service-oriented.

## **Does it Work?**

Using these methods at church over three years, our groups have grown in size and in musical maturity. Participants come because of the fellowship, and making music is the outgrowth, not vice versa. At the beginning of this year, each of my adult groups completed the circle(s) activity described earlier for broadening established groups.



For more information  
you may contact the  
author,  
Kathy Aspenwall, at  
kaspennwall@gmail.com

Our celebrations were 75% non-musical, but our growth areas were equally divided between musical and spiritual development. The fact that separate ensembles came up with very similar strengths and goals just adds more credence to the idea that, when our ensembles are already showing care and concern for each other, we can reach for higher goals. Rehearsals are relaxed but full of high expectations. Ringers are faithful in attendance, except for cases of vacation and major illness. Many come to church and practice their part individually. Handbell choirs are playing more difficult music and, more importantly, they are playing with more expression. Yes, it does work. I hope you'll give it a try.

## Frequently Asked Questions

---

### 1. **How long did it take you to change your philosophy?**

I spent the first 20 years of my teaching career being the "leader," and the last 20 years in a cooperative environment. It's certainly been refined with time and experience. My hope is to "save" folks my first 20 years.

### 2. **Who runs the rehearsals and makes decisions?**

As a director, I still decide the pace and rehearsal plan. The difference comes in the attitude of letting the group decide goals and make decisions: "How many pieces are we going to play in a semester?" "Do we want to play a special program?" "Do we want to do outreach?" "Do we want to do devotionals?" The other difference is the tone and atmosphere, which encourages questions. For the most part, I choose the repertoire and always assign the parts to best use my ringer's strengths.



### 3. **This is out of my comfort zone. What do you suggest?**

First, it's good to acknowledge that. Start with some easy activities, such as just establishing some goals or doing a simple chart. If you like the ideas of some of the games, check your group and see if someone else might be comfortable leading a game. If you've taken the time to read this entire document, you've already taken the first steps. Believe in yourself and do something that is fairly comfortable, something that just extends you (or someone from the group) a little. While I can do these things easily now, my innate characteristics are still part of me. You do not have to become a different person.

### 4. **My rehearsal time is limited. How do I add extras to it?**

My groups rehearse for 1 hour to 1 hour and 10 minutes each week, from mid August through May. We average playing at least six songs per year, mostly levels 2–3+. We have a wide variety of ages and musical backgrounds. Experience has shown me that, while I might spend approximately 10 minutes in sharing and devotions, the remaining time is focused and a lot is accomplished. I've done breaks in the middle and at the end with fine results both ways. Because the groups are committed to each other and take their responsibility personally, many also do individual practice or small group practice on their own. They've extended practice times when the schedule permits and this happens with and without my direction.



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

[www.HandbellMusicians.org](http://www.HandbellMusicians.org)

1055 E. Centerville Station Rd. • Dayton, Ohio 45459

800-878-5459