

# The Structure of the Communication Process

in Faith-Based Settings

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

## **The Structure of the Communication Process in Faith-Based Settings**

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# Introduction

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Communication is one of the most important tools a director utilizes. The structure, or the “nuts and bolts,” of HOW to communicate is the first step.

How do we communicate? How do we attract new ringers? How do we generate interest? How do we notify our ringers and congregation of what’s happening? These are typical questions for every ensemble. Following are practices employed at North Raleigh United Methodist Church (Raleigh, North Carolina), a large church with eight ringing ensembles (four adult and four children/youth).

## Who

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First impressions are important. Looking for a new church, one likely examines the general atmosphere, friendliness, quality of music, quality of sermon, and follow-up materials. Many churches are visited only once before someone moves on. Visitors hear our handbell ensembles one time (if we’re playing that week) and make a judgment call. Every service we play is an opportunity to attract a new handbell enthusiast, listener or ringer, member or visitor.

We are often asked how we attract new members from the congregation. Our programs build on themselves—our participants are our best tool to encourage new members. As they are excited and pleased with what they do, the excitement spreads. Since our music ministry is extensive, we have the luxury of having a “graded” bell program, so it’s easier to fit a new person into an appropriate place. Please remember that extensive ministry programs are built; they don’t happen by chance. Our handbell ministry has a lot of exposure, which also helps generate interest and appreciation.



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.

# What

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In our church, new members participate in a Discovery Class for new members. Since many churches offer similar classes, check on opportunities to present the music-ministry offerings to the class members. At NRUMC, missions and activities of the church have tables with display boards, pamphlets, forms, any pertinent information, and volunteers to answer questions (see fig. 1). Many churches utilize permanent display areas. This opportunity provides an overview of the breadth and depth of the ministry areas. Any display will help the attraction process. Our church also utilizes an Every Member in Ministry form (download a sample in the sidebar on the right) and encourages every member to be involved in some aspect of ministry beyond simply attending worship. We often get “leads” from these forms and follow up with personal phone calls.

# When

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The next consideration is to determine the length and schedule for your program. All of our music ensembles begin in the fall. Kids and youth are moved into the age-appropriate groups and parents complete a registration form. One form, including medical and contact information, is completed for each child (download sample at right). These are available approximately a month before rehearsals begin and are available/advertised on our website, in bulletins, in pew racks, at the information desk, in the church office, and in the music suite. The week before rehearsals begin, information packets (including fall worship schedule for all groups, directors’ contact roster, and a welcome letter) are mailed to the parents of all registered kids and youth.

Our rehearsals are scheduled so that children and youth may participate in both ringing and singing programs. The participants are assigned by grade, which allows all vocal choirs to meet simultaneously, followed by all ringing ensembles meeting simultaneously (for our



**Fig. A** - Click to view a larger version



Click [HERE](#) to download a sample version of the Every Member in Ministry form.



Click [HERE](#) to download a sample version of the Youth Registration Form.



Click [HERE](#) to download a sample of the I Wanna Ring form.



Click [HERE](#) to download a sample of the Ring and Sing Praise Schedule.

four-year-olds and kindergarteners, we offer Cherub Choir followed by a “Bible Buddies” group that meets during the older kids’ ringing rehearsals). We also provide music ministry shirts (checked out, similar to a choir robe) for all of our children and youth to wear, and we distribute these in the fall along with a care-instruction form.

Adult ringers complete our I Wanna Ring form (download sample to the left), which provides pertinent contact information and a commitment clause for rehearsal attendance. Please note the other questions about willingness/ability to ring bass bells, along with ensemble preference. Placement is entirely at the directors’ discretion, but preferences are taken into account. These interest forms are available at our annual end-of-year concert in June to jump-start recruiting for the following fall as well as allow current ringers to renew their commitments immediately.

Once our ensembles are filled, we notify everyone of their placement and review rehearsal times and starting dates. We meet individually with all new members for an orientation.

Our Ring and Sing Praise! schedule is available online and in print before rehearsals begin (download sample to the left). The fall schedule (September through December) is released in late July, and the spring schedule (January through June) is released in mid-November. This schedule covers all of our music groups, vocal and instrumental. With a program this large, it’s nearly impossible to find a date which works for everyone to ring, so the ringers understand there may be dates where they are away and a substitute is used; however, we find that most of our musicians are very committed and do their best to work around “their” scheduled dates as much as possible.

While our formal program runs mid-August through early June, we offer optional summer activities consisting of workshops that range from ringing techniques, rhythms, basic and advanced theory, etc., as well as opportunities for ensemble ringing or reading sessions. We utilize various resources from our handbell community to help with these sessions.

# Where

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Most of our activities are at the church, but we actively encourage participation in various festivals and workshops (including Distinctly Bronze for our advanced ringers).

# How

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In our technical world, it is imperative to decide what type of communication works for each ensemble. For example, our entire youth ministry communicates through Twitter and text messaging, as the youth seldom read e-mails. While our church has a Facebook page and many members participate, it isn't utilized widely enough to effectively communicate this way. The vast majority of communication with our adult ensembles at NRUMC is through e-mail. We find e-mail efficient, timely, and appreciated by our membership. One can even use this for last-minute notifications as long as replies are required for confirmation. If the reply isn't received, a follow-up phone call is made. Decide if you wish to give your cell phone number for calls and/or text messages, and provide each member of your ensemble(s) with a "ringer roster" of the other members' names and contact information. Obviously, which type(s) of communication used will be based on individual decisions that must work for your ensembles/ministry; but whichever you use, be consistent with logistics, reminders, and special announcements.

Equally important for us is placing rehearsal dates and times in the bulletin and on the church calendar, both printed and available on the church website. The weekly calendar serves as a reminder for members and demonstrates the depth and breadth of the ministry to visitors. Our newsletter is now incorporated with the bulletin, but if your church utilizes separate newsletters, music schedules and activities must be included. Our church also provides separate brochures



Click [HERE](#) to download a sample of the Music Ministries brochure.

describing each ministry area. All our music ensembles (for all ages) are described in one brochure (see Example #6). We utilize large flat-screen monitors in our lobby and atrium, where special programs and new classes are announced.

As far as frequency of communication, it's generally better to "over-communicate" than "under-communicate." Especially if we're dealing with children or youth, parents must be notified (and well in advance). Never place upon a child the responsibility of delivering a message home. It's great to send a reminder email before a Sunday worship responsibility.

## Options

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If one is planning any type of trip with youth and children, communication must include pertinent information as to itinerary, appropriate accommodations, meals, transportation, chaperones, and medical forms. Decide if you need to have a mandatory parent meeting before traveling and if you will utilize contracts signed by both student and parent to cover expectations and grant permission to travel. Payment schedules need to be publicized as soon as the trip is announced, and if fund-raising is used on an individual basis, spreadsheets must be maintained to track finances. "Safe-arrival notifications" and other updates need to be made by phone chains, social networks, and/or e-mail. Remember to allow ample time to procure charter buses and make hotel reservations when needed.

Attendance can often be one of our largest challenges. To simplify keeping track of absences, we have a desk-sized calendar in the music suite which serves as our "sign-out" calendar. It is the total responsibility of the members to sign out for rehearsals and worship services by adding their names to the date(s) they'll be away. Before planning repertoire and scheduling dates, we check this calendar for absences. Directors also keep spreadsheet calendars of rehearsal dates and worship services in our rehearsal binders for our individual bell choirs. This



provides a quick look to see when substitutes are needed.

In a nutshell, the practical side of communication must be timely, reliable, and complete.



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