

Hudson Valley Handbell Festival/Conference Benefit From Tammy Turnage, Music Director

Here are some pictures of what is left of our church after Katrina. Our handbell area was on the left side of the church and it was where we practiced and played each Sunday. Let me tell you about the dedicated group of ringers who practiced weekly before the bells were washed away.

Mary is a preschool teacher who lost her job last year when the school she was teaching in closed. Her home was damaged and she is living in a trailer until their home is livable. Loren works for the Mississippi Power company and Sally, his wife, is employed in the office of the Salvation Army. Loren and Sally's home, which received extensive damage, was on 2nd street in Gulfport. They put on life jackets and swam to a building north of their home during the hurricane. Verla, our eldest member, had much damage also. Youth teams were here last week to help work in her home. All of the homes south of Verla's were destroyed by the hurricane. Margie, lost her home but was always so faithful in ringing the bass bells. Reading music did not come easily, but she would work on her part until she mastered it. Libby's husband lost his law office that had recently moved to the beach, and you will see a picture of our first church service which was held on the porch of their home. Lois, lost her home but would hardly ever miss a practice. Robert's home was right on the beach in Long Beach and he came back after the storm to find only rubble. Linda and Mary Beth's homes were the only ones spared. As for mine, we had almost 6 ft. of water and are living in a trailer in our driveway until we can rebuild and move back.

Let me say that music has been such a huge part of the healing process for our church. We are presently meeting in an elementary school gym and believe it or not, we have more people attending than ever before. Our choir started singing again just a few weeks after the storm and they have been such a blessing to everyone. Our handbell choir truly misses practicing and playing. We are not the most polished group you have ever heard, in fact, we were working towards playing in our very first handbell festival this year. I had just received new music that I ordered in August and we had just started on our new pieces.

As you can tell from the pictures, we lost everything; our handbell music, tables, pads, music folders, handbells, and cases. You can't even tell where the platform was. Someone said that they found a large handbell on the beach, but just left it there.

So many Sunday mornings, I will pass a handbell player that will say "I surely miss our bell choir." I do too. I just don't know how we can afford bells when we have a church building to rebuild.

We have lost not only our church, but also our homes. And yet we still want to ring, bless our community with the talents God has given us, and help others as well.

We would appreciate any help you can give us and thank you for thinking of us.

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Donations can be made to assist through the Hudson