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Western Springs church gets bells back after a year of silence



All Saints Episcopal Church leaders, from left, Susan Cherco, Jane Schenck, Jim Gumina, The Rev. L.D. Wood-Hull and Bob Konold, stand together during a ceremony marking the return of restored bells after a year absence to the church in Western Springs. (Hank Beckman/Pioneer Press)



By [Hank Beckman](#)

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For the first time in almost a year, the bells of All Saints Episcopal Church in Western Springs resounded Sunday throughout the neighborhood around the church at 4370 Woodland Avenue in Western Springs.

The restored bells were welcomed by about 50 people there to celebrate the return of a longstanding neighborhood tradition.

“Last week we blessed the bells and dedicated a new control system and equipment, and this week we’re celebrating with the community,” The Rev. L.D. Wood-Hull, All Saints rector, said. He offered a short prayer before demonstrating the new bell’s sound. “People are excited to hear the bells ringing again. They missed that.”

Wood-Hull said the bells, originally installed over 60 years ago, have long played a key role in the neighborhood.

“They’ve been pealing at noon and 6 p.m. for many years, long before my arrival in 2021,” he said, noting they often have been a signal to the neighborhood children that it was time for lunch or dinner.



The Rev. L.D. Wood-Hull, rector of All Saints Episcopal Church, welcomes visitors Sunday to a celebration of the restored bells at the church in Western Springs. “People are excited to hear the bells ringing again,” he said. “They missed that.” (Hank Beckman/Pioneer Press)

But a problem surfaced late last year when the 1962 electrical mechanism of the bells began to fail.

“First one bell quit, then the second bell quit, and we decided there was something massively wrong, and we really needed to stop,” said Jane Schenck, the church’s treasurer.

Church officials decided not to ring them until repairs could be made, and they launched a fundraising effort early this year, successfully gathering the cash to make necessary repairs. Some donations are still coming in.

The three repaired bells — which collectively produce a B-flat minor chord — are not exactly lightweight, weighing in at 900, 700, and 500 pounds respectively. They were made in the Netherlands and the repairs were done at Verdin, a Cincinnati-based company that is one of the few in the world that performs this type of work.

And those repairs didn’t come cheap, costing almost \$50,000 for restoration and maintenance.

Bob Konold, the chair of the bell repair fundraising committee whose family has lived in Western Spring since 1988, spoke about not only the cost of the bells repair, but the challenge of general church operations.

“Actually, we’re replacing our boiler right now, and the campaign was so successful that if there was overflow money, the parishioners agreed that that money instead could go to the boiler,” he said. He stressed that since the church specifically sent out fundraising communications about the bell’s repair, that’s what it would go toward. “But any money that community members and past parishioners donated went to the bells...we wanted to make sure that their money went to that.”

Konold said that the church wasn’t particularly active in fundraising lately.

“We haven’t done any outside fundraising outside the church for a while,” he said. “We did build a rectory next door, but that was all money raised by parishioners and also some funds that the church borrowed from its own.”

Susan Cherco, junior warden of the parish, is a long-time parishioner who was very specific about what the bells meant to her.

“For me they mean the start of service,” she said, “and this was exciting, because today was the first time they rang for the start of service since they’ve been restored. And it was suddenly like ‘oh, something was missing before.’”

Senior warden Jim Gumina also was pleased with the renewed sound.

“I’m excited, we got our bells back,” he said. “We ring them Sundays before the 10 O’Clock service. We only ring them on the 10 O’Clock service because 8 O’Clock is a little early.”

Gumina said that 20 percent of the money donated for the restoration came from non-church members.

“This is a celebration and a thank you to the community for helping us bring the bells back,” he said. “All Saints is a great place to be. Everyone’s welcome.”

Hank Beckman is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.