

Ring Praise Music Ministry 2011 Journal

Snake River Correctional Institution, Ontario, Oregon, 2-20-11

On Sunday, February 20, following our worship services, we headed to the Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario, Oregon for two concerts, one at 2:00 pm and the other at 6:30 pm. We have been there several times over the last few years, beginning in 2005. It takes a while to get us plus all the equipment checked in so we need to allow plenty of time. When we finally got to the chapel, it was just about time for a few guys to arrive to help us and get the room in order. They set up chairs and got all the sound hooked up and adjusted. Sean uses an electronic keyboard so he needed that working plus a monitor and Phyllis needed her microphone adjusted. We also decided to use the theatre organ accompaniment track for *Glory Bound* so that also needed to be set.

Over 230 guys attended the two concerts. Since many have heard us before and they know us, we were greeted with lots of handshakes and words of gratitude for coming again. As always, the sense of worship is dynamic and Spirit-filled. They are not hesitant to say a hearty "Amen" after a piece. A very moving time for each of us was during *The Rugged Cross*. During each concert, both of us could hear many of them softly singing the words while we played.

For each concert, we have an exact amount of time so we plan to fill it completely with music. Phyllis watches the clock carefully so adjustments can be made if necessary. Well, it took longer for everyone to get checked in for the first concert so we needed to cut one piece. Then the time we had for the second concert was 10 minutes shorter to begin with and would take even longer to check everyone in since it was a much larger group. So during our delicious dinner between concerts in the staff dining room, we decided what we would need to cut for the second concert.

After the second concert, we were invited to join in a prayer circle with about 12 inmates as they prayed for each other and also for the success of Ring Praise. It is so exciting to see the Lord shining in them through the care they have for each other and the joy that is on their faces when they are in worship.

Shortly afterward, we received a beautiful letter from one of the inmates who has been at all of our concerts thanking us for our ministry.

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, Pendleton, Oregon, 4-1-11

We began our Eastern Oregon Tour by heading to Pendleton Thursday afternoon, March 31, and stayed with Jack and Terral Schut. Jack is the pastor at Tutuilla Presbyterian Church and worked on the arrangements for our concert Friday, April 1 at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in Pendleton. It was authorized by the legislature in 1983 as the first medium-security adult male correctional facility established outside Marion County. Until its conversion to a prison, EOCI had been a state mental hospital, with most of the buildings originally constructed in 1912-13. The first inmates were received on June 24, 1985. The 1600-bed facility is Pendleton's fourth largest employer. It is located on the edge of town, next to railroad tracks with Blue Mountain Community College just up the hill from it.

The chaplain had a few questions regarding Phyllis's equipment list that she sent in advance, such as the need for the clothes rack, funny hats, sunglasses and train whistle, but everything was approved! He was anticipating questions from the commanding officer which he did get and then was able to answer.

The chapel was beautiful with a domed ceiling with gorgeous murals of various sizes painted by the inmates. The room was acoustically very live which made it difficult to hear distinctly the fast notes on the piano. When they sang *You Are My All in All*, the sound was incredible. For the chorus after the second verse, Sean stopped playing and the beautiful blend of their voices in harmony was amazing. The sound reverberated and filled the room.

One of the guys who came had heard us when he was at Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario. He had been telling all his friends now at Pendleton to come to the concert. The 50 in attendance were very energetic and engaged in the music. A few were softly singing when we played *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* and *Amazing Grace*. During *How Great Thou Art*, one was mouthing the words and another was looking up with his arms raised in awe of our great God. One of the first questions was when are we coming back. We promised we will definitely return.

Afterward, the chaplain told us that we had a "first." It was the first time some guards and nurses wanted to listen and stood with the door partly open so they could hear.

Community Presbyterian Church, Umatilla, Oregon, 4-1-11

After the correctional facility concert, we relaxed before heading to Umatilla for our evening concert at Community Presbyterian Church. What a gorgeous afternoon – temperature in the 70's. The Umatilla church has been without a pastor for 11 years, relying on various lay people and clergy in the area to fill the pulpit. Average worship attendance is under 15. So when there were 49 people at the concert, the most we have ever had there, a couple of members commented how nice it was to see the church full of people. Norma, our contact and tireless worker for the church, has been the backbone behind it staying open. It is always good to see her and the other faithful members.

The church is situated on a hill with both the Columbia and Umatilla Rivers in sight. What a beautiful location! The lower level does have a ground entrance which makes it convenient for the preschool that is housed there.

Two years ago when we were here, the Hammond organ didn't work. They had it looked at and discovered it needed oil which is a common problem for these older organs. So Sean was able to play a prelude on it.

There are a couple of churches in Hermiston that have bell choirs and some of the ringers came. Duane Brudevold, pastor at Faith Presbyterian Church in Hermiston, and his wife came. The two churches are only about 10 miles apart and they support each other's ministries. When we were in Hermiston last year, several from Umatilla attended.

As is true at all our concerts, the audience enjoyed ring along with the handchimes. Three kids came up to play the sand blocks on *Glory Bound*. Afterward there was a great array of cookies in their fellowship hall which is downstairs from the sanctuary. When we were done fielding questions upstairs and went down, we were amazed at the number that had gone down for the reception.

Community Presbyterian Church, Pilot Rock, Oregon, 4-2-11

After a tasty breakfast and conversation with Jack in Pendleton, we headed to Pilot Rock fighting a strong cross wind for a light lunch with Todd and Lyla Bensel before setting up for our 4:00 pm concert. Todd is the pastor at Community Presbyterian Church. The old sanctuary building burned to the ground November 11, 2007 but the Christian Education building next to it survived with just some damage on the side. Last year they were able to move into the new building with the sanctuary and fellowship hall on the same level and a beautiful covered drive up to the entrance. What a process this has been for Todd and the congregation.

There is a beautiful upright piano and state-of-the-art digital piano. Sean used the digital piano for *Breathe* and *Variations on Zacchaeus*. He always has a good time with pianos like this as he tries to find just the sounds he wants for these pieces.

In preparation for the concert, Todd, Sean and Phyllis prayed together and as always God's providence is magnificent. Sean had a lingering cough that seemed to surface during quiet songs at the earlier concerts. Phyllis prayed that Sean's cough would be silenced during the concert. There were many other people coughing during the concert, but not Sean! Praise God!

One lady who was at the Umatilla concert the night before came and brought her whole family. There were many kids which made *Glory Bound* especially fun as they shared 3 sets of sand blocks. It was a very ecumenical audience of 50 people representing many denominations.

Afterward there was a fabulous spread of assorted sandwiches, homemade pickles, fruits, vegetables with cakes and sweetbreads to satisfy our sweet tooth. They have enjoyed their new handicap accessible facilities which have opened up many new opportunities for this growing congregation to serve the community.

Community Presbyterian Church, Ukiah, Oregon, 4-3-11

After the concert in Pilot Rock, we drove to Ukiah and stayed at the Antlers Inn which is across the street from the church. It is a cozy rustic inn with antlers all over the front of the building and many sets inside. It has about 15 rooms with 2 bathrooms and showers that are shared by the occupants.

Sean met a man who was staying there who grew up in his hometown of Ontario, Oregon. His family has been close friends with Sean's family, and Sean even gave piano lessons to a couple of his cousins and also did a benefit concert with one at the College of Idaho.

We were leading the worship service for the small congregation at Community Presbyterian Church. There were 8 at the service which is 2 more than their membership at the end of 2009! Nancy Martin, our contact and Clerk of Session, opened the church for us and was very appreciative of our presence and music. She usually plays the piano and enjoyed being able to listen and worship. For the worship service, we followed a typical order of service and put various songs at appropriate places

such as *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* to open prayer time and closing with playing *The Lord's Prayer* while asking them to silently pray it. After a unison prayer of confession and declaration of pardon, we played *Psalm of Love* whose songs speak of God's love for us and our love for Him.

Opening hymns were done as ring alongs. The congregation had fun, but Phyllis commented after the first song that she felt it was just a duet with Sean. They laughed and said it was hard to get the coordination of ringing and singing at the same time. By the last song they were doing very well.

The church houses the Ukiah food bank. In the past, it has been piled on pews in the back of the sanctuary. They have now partitioned off a section in the back to form a barrier between the food bank and the sanctuary.

Following the service we sat around the table in the kitchen/fellowship area and enjoyed conversation with coffee, doughnuts, and homemade banana nut muffins. We then drove to Pilot Rock for lunch with Todd and Lyla Bensel on our way to Milton-Freewater.

Grace Presbyterian Church, Milton-Freewater, Oregon, 4-3-11

When we arrived at Grace Presbyterian Church in Milton-Freewater about an hour and forty-five minutes before the concert, there were people there waiting to help us with whatever we needed.

This congregation has a couple of big changes happening and has a very positive, supporting attitude. For several years they shared the building with another church. That church has just moved to Walla Walla because more of its members are there. In addition, on September 1 their pastor, Ginger Johnston, is retiring.

The church has a Rodgers organ which Sean played for prelude. They also have a beautiful Steinway piano that was made to fit in slightly smaller homes because it is missing a few keys on the top. It complemented the bells beautifully and sang out during Sean's solos.

They had worked hard on advertising with posters in several churches, article in the local newspaper and announcements on the local NPR station. It paid off with 45 at the concert with the majority coming from outside the congregation. Following the concert there was a lovely reception with many delicious cookies and punch.

The youngest person at the concert asked the first question – How many bells are on the table? (36) She also came up afterward to be able to ring one. Phyllis explained how the entire casting vibrates then rang the biggest bell so she could feel the vibration as Phyllis touched it to her back.

After everything was packed up, we had a magnificent dinner with Sean's hosts. Also part of the party was Phyllis's host, the pastor, and the couple who has been the contact and hosts for our other concerts here. Great fellowship! Then we had a phenomenal breakfast at 7:00 Monday morning with Phyllis's host. It needed to be early because Sean had to be at the College of Idaho to teach a class at 1:00 pm. As we traveled home, we praised God for all the opportunities we've had to share the Good News of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

First United Methodist Church, Nampa, Idaho, 4-15-11

On Friday, April 15, we gave a benefit concert for the Nampa Salvation Army at First United Methodist Church, Nampa. People began arriving almost a half hour early! It was a very busy evening for events in Nampa and we were thrilled when there were around 110 people who generously gave \$1,550.01 to support the work of the Salvation Army.

With one minute to go, Ron told the pastor to be ready to start and welcome everyone. In the meantime, Sean asked all of us if we wanted to pray. Well, the pastor welcomed everyone and then we weren't there to start. So he got up again and said we would begin when the musicians get here! Our prayers were answered – it was a beautiful concert glorifying God.

Special guest was Master Voice, a quartet with Helen Watts, Cathy McCrear, Harold Keech and Marvin Bloomquist. Phyllis has been accompanying them and Sean added organ on one of their pieces. Since air could be heard leaking from one of the organ pipes, Sean had turned the organ off for the beginning of the concert. Phyllis started the intro of a piece on the piano. When Sean began to play, nothing happened, and he realized he had forgotten to turn it on! It took several seconds for the organ to warm up before he was able to join in.

Most of our concerts have fewer people when we do ring along with the audience. Wow, what glorious singing with a 110 voice choir!

For Glory Bound, there were 4 kids who helped with sand blocks. We always enjoy involving the kids and the audience loves watching them.

It is always rewarding to help the Salvation Army with their work. Major Bill Hathorn spoke to our hearts with the story of a young man and the impact the Army has had on him. We continually praise and thank God for allowing us to be His instruments in spreading the message of grace and salvation through Jesus Christ.

Community Presbyterian Church, King Hill, Idaho, 4-16-11

On Saturday, April 16, we headed to Community Presbyterian Church in King Hill, Idaho for our “annual” concert. Between Christmas and spring concerts, we have played at this church just about every year. With less than 10 members, they had publicized extremely well, and we had 32 people at the concert! It is always good to catch up on the news of this faith community who works so hard to bring the gospel to their small town. This church continues to search for a pastor.

Cathy McCrea from MasterVoice at our concert the night before had noticed the King Hill pictures on the display board and told us that is where she grew up and learned piano at the church. We mentioned it to someone at the concert, and he figured out who it was and remembered her as an excellent singer (Cathy Kling).

Sean’s music theory teacher from his student days at the College of Idaho plays classical guitar and has moved to King Hill. He was helping his sister move into the house next to the church so Sean was able to visit with him for a while.

Following the afternoon concert, they had sandwich fixings, veggie tray and fruit for everyone. What a delicious spread to fill our tummies before heading home.

Afterward one lady asked Ron if she could have a copy of the poem we used to introduce *Glory Bound*. Of course! He gave her the one from his script. We get many requests for this, including at the Ontario, Oregon prison where they made many copies for the guys.

The friendly dogs that have greeted us in the past found Sean after the concert as we were loading everything up. He was surrounded by black labs!

We always go away from our King Hill concerts praising God for the faithful servants in this community.

First Lutheran Church, Idaho Falls, Idaho, 7-10-11

Contact for this concert began at the Big Sky Festival in Missoula, MT the end of April. Phyllis was at the festival, and the director from the church told her they would love to have Ring Praise come and give a concert. Members of the church’s bell choir handled various aspects of the concert from publicity, ushering and cake and lemonade afterward to housing us.

Sean played a prelude on the beautiful Rodgers organ, going to full organ at the end of the piece – what a sound! He also enjoyed the Kawai grand piano. The acoustics of the sanctuary were awesome providing for a great ring along portion with harmony during each song by the 50 people in attendance.

During questions, one person expressed appreciation for the selection of hymns. At the reception, one person told us that their daughter wanted to come and kept reminding them about the concert. They were very glad she insisted on coming. We stayed with Andy and Martha Wentzel who were both musicians. They had a lovely dinner for us beforehand and many questions afterward. About 10:30 pm, they asked if we wanted to take some lunch with us in the morning. Andy whipped up a delicious chicken salad which made a wonderful lunch. What a great start to our tour!

First Church of the Nazarene, Billings, Montana, 7-11-11

Our contact was Sally Venard, Janna Pyle’s mom. Janna, at College Church of the Nazarene in Nampa, and Phyllis have rung a couple of duets together and are good friends. We have even done a fund raising concert to refurbish their bells. Sandwiches were provided beforehand and a reception afterward complete with more sandwiches, shrimp, dips and sweets.

For *Glory Bound*, 4 siblings poured lots of energy into the sand blocks. With only 3 sets, 2 kids shared by each having one and trying to sand and “pattycake” together. The audience loved their enthusiasm and creativity. Our host family’s children are all graduates of Northwest Nazarene University with the youngest still attending. We are grateful to them for providing another delicious lunch for our drive to Bismarck.

Sean improvises a resurrection piece every concert. During this evening’s performance, Sean was playing and he felt a nudge to add *Awesome God* to his arrangement. This was something he had never done before and was not terribly familiar with the piece. After the concert was over, a lady came up to him in tears about how she had been so close to death’s doors five months ago due to many issues including cancer, MRSA infection and other horrible ailments. She spoke of singing this song before going into surgery and used this song throughout her healing. The power of prayer and continued belief in our

Awesome God took her from almost sure death and blindness to being healthy and able to tell others. God surely put that song in Sean's heart in God's unique way of using His servants to minister to each other. What an Awesome God we have!

Edgewood Village, Bismarck, North Dakota, 7-12-11

On the drive we saw incredible texture in the landscape and stopped at a few viewpoints including the Painted Canyon – Badlands shortly after entering North Dakota.

At the retirement center, we set up in a stage area in the dining room. A few people were still eating, asked about the entertainment, and were excited it was handbells. As people were gathering, one lady knew how to ring and was teaching her friends how to ring the chimes before the concert. Sean played several old standards like *Tea for Two* and *Stardust* which intrigued several to come in and see what was happening. About 45 attended including several listening on the balcony overlooking the dining room.

Since we were driving another 100 miles after the concert, we stopped for our favorite salads at Applebee's. This area has been hit very hard with flooding and we saw the Missouri River still out of its banks. There were also sections where one lane of the interstate still had some water on it and was sandbagged. You could even smell the stagnant water at times. Since it was night and there was so much water, by the time we reached our hotel in Jamestown, ND, the entire front of the van was repainted "bug."

The Wellstead of Rogers, Rogers, Minnesota, 7-13-11

This is a retirement center/village with many levels of care from retirement houses to Alzheimer & dementia care. We were in the building for moderate Alzheimer & dementia care. For the safety of the residents, security was tight. When we entered the section beyond the reception area, we walked into a beautiful faux old-fashioned town square complete with benches around trees and flowers, large clock, soda shop, beauty salon, chapel, eating area, and town hall. There were also some birds caged in a corner and an aquarium in the wall between the square and a sitting area. We played in the town hall which was also the activities center. Everything was bright and cheery with lots of resident artwork displayed in the activities center.

The love shown to the residents by the staff was beautiful. They are truly special people called to care for these men and women.

As we played, many were quietly singing or humming the hymns that they knew. A couple of people got tearful when we played certain hymns that must have brought back special memories. It was truly a blessing to us to see the transformation on their faces as we played.

Afterward we stopped at Culver's so we could try a world-famous ButterBurger. They were delicious! Since we were in Rogers, Minnesota, Sean had his picture taken in front of the Rogers sign.

National Seminar, Handbell Musicians of America, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 7-17-11

This was a four-day seminar complete with many educational classes ranging from bell techniques to taking care of your fingers to achieving musicality and several concerts including a hymn fest at a large local church. We were "teaching" a class which was actually a demonstration of our ministry and that it isn't just for Sunday mornings. We presented an abbreviated concert with suggestions on how some of the pieces or similar pieces could be used in various places within a regular worship service.

Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 7-18-11

The heat and humidity in Minneapolis was near record, followed us and got worse as we headed to La Crosse, Wisconsin. We spent the afternoon with Phyllis's brother and sister-in-law. We stayed in a lovely local inn near them where there was homemade mini sweet bread freshly baked in each room.

The church has an adult and a youth bell choir. For a hot and steamy night, we were pleased that 36 people ventured out for a concert. Sean played a prelude on their beautiful pipe organ. Three girls came up to do the sand blocks for *Glory Bound* and having fun doing some train sound during the poem Phyllis read. You could tell they were having a lot of fun along with the audience who enjoyed watching them.

We marveled at the beautiful stained glass windows around the sanctuary and paid special attention to the music window that even has handbells in it. Afterward the pastor and many others told us that we could come back anytime!

Yorkfield Presbyterian Church, Elmhurst, Illinois, 7-19-11

This is the church where Phyllis grew up and whose stained glass window is on the cover of their first CD, *Ring Praise*. At Phyllis's request, Sean played the Finale from Widor's 5th Symphony on the organ where her mother had played for decades.

Phyllis knew many of the people who attended, including a Sunday School teacher and friends of her parents. She even used the beautiful wooden music stand which was dedicated in her father's memory since he sang in the choir for years. With only one youth in the audience, he was asked to pick two others to join him for the *Glory Bound* sand blocks.

Sean was given a tour of the area where Phyllis grew up and the many changes to the neighborhood with several smaller homes being torn down and very large ones built on the lots. He was able to feast on a real Chicago hot dog from Portillo's; fantastic BBQ sandwiches from Russell's, a restaurant that opened in 1930 and still using the same sauce recipe; pizza from Aurelios and fancy mints from Fannie May Candies. They also tried unusual flavors at a new ice cream store – Mango Pomegranate and Blueberry Pie. Fabulous!

Bethlehem Woods Retirement Center, La Grange Park, Illinois, 7-20-11

This is a very large center with several buildings. Once we found the main entrance, we were warmly greeted by the staff who even got a cart to help haul our equipment. They already had lemonade set up for us and also brought in water. 56 residents attended the concert and were very appreciative of all the music and narrations. They also did a great job with ring along. Several visited afterward asking about our ministry and thanking us for including them in our tour. We were so blessed by the hospitality of both the staff and residents.

We stayed with a high school classmate of Phyllis's brother who is a Deacon at Yorkfield Presbyterian Church. What fun reminiscing and catching up on what each has been doing over the years.

Sean has been to Chicago several times, but has never really seen the skyline nor been downtown. So we headed to Kalamazoo, Michigan by taking the Eisenhower Expressway east to downtown Chicago. As we drove down State Street and Michigan Avenue, Sean could see many shopping areas and the "L" which is the elevated train forming the "Loop." We then headed a little north until we were out of the main downtown area before turning around to go south on Lake Shore Drive. He saw Navy Pier, many high-rise condos, beautiful parks and Lake Michigan. We followed it to South Chicago and into Indiana before catching a tollway to connect with their route to Michigan. Yes, there are tollways in Illinois!

Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 7-21-11

We were warmly welcomed at the Second Reformed Church as if we were already friends. Phyllis had only had email contact with their bell choir director. The pastor and others were there to greet us and help unload. We noticed that the electronic sign out front had the concert on it, so Phyllis stood ready with the camera as it cycled through the other messages.

They have a beautiful sanctuary with some modern stained glass windows themed "God is the Light of the World!" The five windows represent Creation, Covenant, Redemption, Church and Eternal Life. There is also a 51-rank organ which had Sean drooling and a large Yamaha grand piano. He was glad we were there early so he could enjoy these instruments. Besides playing an organ prelude, Sean adapted the accompaniment for *He Leadeth Me* to organ. There was a delicious potluck with members of the bell choir before the concert and an incredible array of goodies for a reception afterward. One member of the bell choir had been baking all week!

Members of the youth bell choir were ushers. There were about 90 people, including many bell ringers from various churches, some retired directors, and current and retired professors from Western Michigan University. Many commented how much they enjoyed the ring along.

What a wonderful night of conversation with our hosts! After a lovely breakfast, we set out for Detroit to meet up with Phyllis's husband, Ron, and they would attend a family wedding. We were blessed to be in the midst of this beautiful congregation.

Arbor Trace, Richmond, Indiana, 7-24-11

It was a little more crowded with 3 in the van driving to Indiana. The one extra seat was kept quite a ways forward so everything would fit for our tour which didn't allow for much leg room plus the seat was very upright.

Arbor Trace is an assisted living and nursing home where Phyllis's mother-in-law (Ella Mae) lives. We were so pleased to be doing a concert there for her and the other residents. She has seen several videos of our concerts, but never experienced one live. For *Glory Bound* sand blocks, Phyllis asked the three youngest men to come forward: Ron, his brother, and their nephew! His mom thoroughly enjoyed watching them!!! For Sean's resurrection piece, he wove together a medley of four of

Ella Mae's favorite pieces which Phyllis had asked her about earlier (not telling her why she wanted them): *In the Garden*, *Just As I Am*, *Precious Memories*, and *He Lives*. About 25 residents packed the room.

Ella Mae loves cashews so Ron and Phyllis give her a big jar each year for Christmas. Phyllis had a large jar packed in the van for this visit. While at National Seminar, Sean noticed the jar and started to open it thinking it was snacks for their travels. Phyllis quickly told him no and who they were for! Phyllis shared the story with Ella Mae on Saturday, and when Sean got there on Sunday, she immediately offered him some!

We stayed with Ron's brother and sister-in-law and Ron and Phyllis had fun Saturday evening going through lots of old pictures so we could transport some back with us in the van.

First Baptist Church, Richmond, Indiana, 7-24-11

This is the church where Ron grew up and even saw one of his Sunday School teachers that morning. We played two pieces at the 9:00 am worship service. As Phyllis talked with the pastor before worship, she mentioned the sermon reflection/improvisational response that Sean does each Sunday at his home church and asked if he would be interested. He was and was looking forward to what Sean would do with the text about David, 2 Samuel 11.

In the last few years they have made improvements to make the building more accessible. They had a covered entry, but there were then a few stairs once you got inside. They ended up raising part of the driveway/parking lot to eliminate the stairs and moved the covered entry to one side to open up the driveway on the side of the building. If you hadn't seen it beforehand, you would never have guessed what they did. They also changed part of the chancel area and built a small platform to one side which now holds a beautiful Yamaha grand piano.

In place of their 6:00 pm Vespers Service, we gave a full concert. 38 people attended which was a much larger crowd than they normally have for the service. There was great energy on the ring along so Phyllis mentioned that the bell choir director was taking notes on who was ringing!

Phyllis has known a couple from the Cleveland, Ohio area because they have attended National Seminar for several years as well as the Area 10 conference in the Pacific Northwest. She mentioned the concert to them at National, and they came after spending the day in the sun watching a grandchild play ball. It was very special that they went out of their way to come before heading back to Cleveland.

First United Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, Illinois, 7-25-11

The church is in a rural farming community just outside Galesburg, Illinois. As Phyllis was looking for a church to host the concert, she noticed on the PC(USA) website that there was this smaller church only a few miles from Galesburg. She looked at their website and sent an email through a form on the website. The Clerk of Session called her the next day and was delighted and within a week everything was set. We later found out that earlier in the year the clerk had been pushing for internet presence through a website and it paid off! After the concert, they posted that those who missed out really missed a wonderful experience.

Before the concert, a community sandwich meal was served with subs from a local deli that makes their own bread. The potato chips were also made in Illinois. Leftovers made great lunches for a couple of days since we were able to get them in our small cooler.

The church is 176 years old with the current sanctuary built in 1899. A tracker pipe organ was installed in 1900. Sean did a prelude on the organ. The way the sanctuary is situated, the piano ended up in an adjoining fellowship room with large openings into the sanctuary. With no air conditioning and a hot and humid day, there were many oscillating fans around and the doors open. With the fans, the ribbons Phyllis put on the bell tree stand fluttered beautifully throughout the concert. Sean had a fan directly on him which then made it difficult to hear the bells. Luckily each knows what the other is doing so it was mainly an inconvenience. Everyone also had their hand-held fans which were distributed with the programs.

This was truly a community event. This church has 2 octaves of bells, but currently no director. They are hoping someone will take on the choir. The Methodist Church has bells and a choir and several of their ringers attended. Despite the heat, everyone was very energetic during ring along and did a great job.

Following the concert was a wonderful reception with a variety of homemade cookies. Even though it was hot, most people stayed for snacks and to visit. One member of their bell choir wanted to know more about 4-in-hand so Phyllis had her work on setting the bells up for it and ringing each one. A couple of others joined in. Now they will need to practice!

We stayed at a country bed and breakfast where we were greeted with warm bread and locally made organic cheddar cheese. What wonderful hospitality!

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Omaha, Nebraska, 7-26-11

As we drove to Omaha, everywhere we looked we saw corn gently waving in the breeze. We also saw many crop dusters in the days that followed. Phyllis and Ron lived in the Omaha area 1987-1993 and it was a perfect place to stop. Dinner was at El Bees, a Mexican restaurant where they used to go. She met her contact, Joyce, several years ago at a National Seminar in Palm Springs. They now see each other every year. Joyce directs bell choirs at three different churches plus two community choirs. Many of the audience members were in one of her choirs.

Sean found beautiful instruments in this church like he has in so many others on our tour. This one had a beautiful Rodgers organ on which he played a prelude and a wonderful Petrof grand piano. For *Glory Bound*, there was only one youth so he got to pick two other people to come up and play the sand blocks with him.

After the concert we had a wonderful time with our hosts, Jim and Sid. We had delicious pie and ice cream then Sean discussed antiques with Sid.

Before heading to North Platte, Phyllis showed Sean a little of the area including where she used to live.

Centennial Park Retirement Village, North Platte, Nebraska, 7-27-11

The Activities Director was great – very helpful and worked to get many residents into the concert. The 30+ people packed the room. For *Glory Bound*, instead of using the piano and sand blocks, there was a small boom box in the room so we put in the CD accompaniment that Sean made with his theatre organ. They loved it!

One gentleman in the front row was blind and the guy next to him was explaining what was happening in the concert such as when Phyllis would pick up two bells and about the sizes of the bells. After the concert, Phyllis took the largest bell over to him so he could feel it. She rang it and let him feel the vibration. Then he felt the smallest bell. Next were the mallets for him to feel. Watching the expressions on his face certainly made the need to polish later just fine.

One question a resident asked was how did we find them? Phyllis explained that when a couple of churches didn't work out, she searched on the internet for a retirement center, theirs came up, and she called asking for the activities director.

Many residents stayed afterward and visited as we packed up. One gentleman commented that it was one of the finest programs they have ever had. One lady was a Methodist minister who used to solo ring and used to have her own set of bells. She was so excited about us being there and was very knowledgeable about some of the composers and arrangers of handbell music. We also met the oldest resident, Audrey, who recently turned 100 and was still quite spry.

We stayed with someone Phyllis met at National Seminar. She happened to sit next to her at a concert and found out she was from North Platte. Ann directs bells at the Presbyterian Church, but was unable to host the concert. After the concert she gave us a grand tour of North Platte including ice cream at the city park and a step back in time seeing five amusement rides for kids that are open all summer. There was even a calliope with the merry-go-round. The cost of food and rides is kept low and many teenagers are able to have summer employment. We also enjoyed her garden full of numerous varieties of day lilies.

Rawlins Music Academy, Rawlins, Wyoming, 7-28-11

When we stopped for lunch in Cheyenne, we both got out and gave a sigh of relief at the lack of humidity! Being at 6,000 feet didn't hurt, either. Just before Laramie, we stopped at the summit of the Laramie Range and highest point on transcontinental Interstate 80 at 8,640 feet. There was history on the Old Lincoln Highway and a Lincoln Monument.

The host for our concert was Jubilante Ensembles of Carbon County which was formed in 2006 as a community music organization with a 501(c)3 non-profit status. It consists of a large mixed instrumental ensemble, 2 handbell choirs, and Rawlins Music Academy which provides private instruction on a variety of musical instruments. The concert was in their recital area.

Three adorable young girls played the sand blocks for *Glory Bound*. One was Alexa who had just lost a tooth earlier in the day. Before the concert she came up to Phyllis to tell her what a beautiful top she had on. Afterward, Alexa wanted our autographs and pictures with each of us. She even told Phyllis that she knew *The Old Rugged Cross*.

There was a nice reception with cookies and punch so we could visit with all those who came. Several members of their bell choirs were there and had questions for Phyllis. It also generated interest in their bell choirs as some people expressed an

interest in ringing. The bell choir director commented how much she enjoyed the Christian emphasis of our program yet done subtly.

The academy has three pianos and Sean was asked to evaluate them. All were gifts and they were wondering about their overall condition.

Several times during our tour someone has come up and asked about our ministry from seeing the decals and/or license plate on the van. One lady in Rawlins spoke with Sean as he was loading his luggage and said she was hoping to be able to talk with someone from the van. She had noticed the decals, wanted to know more, and spoke of her relationship with God.

Bear Lake Community Church, Montpelier, Idaho, 7-29-11

We drove through a lot of open country. It makes one appreciate the early pioneers who struggled as they headed west. As we were getting closer to Montpelier, the terrain became greener and more mountainous.

We've played here a couple of other times but not since 2007. There was a nice potluck beforehand and we were able to visit with some members of the church. Sean played a prelude on their Rodgers organ. The ceiling beams reflect in the bells and look like a cross in each bell. The picture in the upper right hand corner of our website was taken here showing this and is also used in washout as a background for our posters. Phyllis also mentioned it during question time and several came up afterward to see.

A couple of people came from the Soda Springs church, about 30 miles away. They have been to several of our concerts. Another lady was from Blackfoot, north of Pocatello. She has a bell choir and was interested in any information Phyllis could give her. Phyllis told her about the Guild and gave her the address for the area website. She also encouraged her to sign up for the monthly newsletters so she can find events close to her.

Everyone here was so appreciative of us coming. They are struggling as kids grow up and move away rather than returning to Montpelier.

We headed home at 8:30 the next morning reflecting on the wonderful tour and on God's blessings that he has poured out on us. Each place has a special spot in our hearts and we look forward to returning to many of these places in the future.

First United Presbyterian Church, Malad City, Idaho, 10-19-11

We left Nampa for a nice drive to Malad City and found a great sandwich shop in Burley. This church has been without a pastor for about three years. God has pulled them together as a congregation to reach out into the community. They have made some building improvements, two other churches use the facilities which provide a little rent income and many scouting organizations use the building weekly. They have also rented the manse.

The congregation continues to look for new ways to serve God and the community. With mission grant money from the Presbytery of Kendall, they have been able to offer Vacation Bible School and a Bible study. Worship attendance has increased from around 10 to 18 or so as various members take turns preaching and a pastor comes from Pocatello once a month. It was exciting listening to them sharing their enthusiasm and spirit of revival.

They had worked hard on concert publicity and it showed. It was a diverse crowd of 26 enthusiastic people including a reporter/photographer from the local newspaper. Since there weren't any kids, five adults volunteered for sand blocks for *Glory Bound* and were all smiles as they rhythmically provided the train sound.

As we were talking with our contact, he shared what they are planning for Christmas. They he asked if there was any chance we could come the week before Christmas. After checking our calendars, we said YES to Monday, December 19!

St. John's Lutheran Church, ELCA, American Falls, Idaho, 10-20-11

This concert was a little different than the others we were doing on this tour featuring their beautiful pipe organ with Sean playing three pieces. We arrived early afternoon so Sean would have time to practice and get used to the organ. As he was practicing, one reed (trumpet) pipe went horribly out of tune which made it impossible to use the reeds on the piece. Fifteen minutes before the concert, two men from the church went into the pipe chamber to try to fix it. They eventually removed the out of tune pipe so the reeds could be used and with the speed of the piece, the missing note wouldn't be detected.

Phyllis began the concert with a processional of *Lauda Anima* with ribbons hooked onto her pinkies. As she was pulling them off during a short piano interlude, one ribbon got wrapped around between the casting and hand guard and was stuck. Sean kept extending the interlude as she figured out how it was wrapped and finally got it off!

For Ring Along, the church had 2 sets of chimes, and when added to Phyllis's set, provided enough for everyone to have one. What a glorious sound with all the chimes and voices praising God. There was a young girl in the audience who was at last year's concert whose mother said really wanted to come again this year. There was also a wonderful reception with a variety of delicious goodies.

The home where we had dinner had four dogs and Sean had a great time with them. One was a Shiba-Inu which was special to Sean since he also has one. This is where Phyllis stayed and in the morning went for a walk with her host and the dogs.

Presbyterian Church of the Big Wood, Ketchum, Idaho, 10-21-11

The beautiful sanctuary has one side totally in glass facing the Big Wood River. The scenery with the autumn yellows and golds of the aspen trees was stunning. Phyllis became acquainted with the music director when she played for a Sunday morning worship service in June. She also knows the pastor and his wife from serving on a Small Church Conference Planning Team with them. After a great dinner at a new Mexican restaurant with the music director and her husband, we had a very appreciative audience. One person attending was from Costa Rica and was here for a couple of months. She was excited to share our YouTube clip with friends back home so they could see and hear about the concert she attended.

There was back lighting in the chancel area that was a form of mood lighting and changed a few times during a piece. Phyllis had no idea this was happening behind her, but Sean said it was beautiful how it changed with the music and added to the impact of each piece.

We were each hosted by members of the choir and had delightful times getting to know them. Phyllis had a surprise in the morning. Someone came to the door asking if we knew who owned the van in the parking lot because she had hit it. She had backed up and the hitch on the back of her truck went into the rear corner of the bumper on Phyllis's van. Luckily only the bumper was damaged.

First Presbyterian Church, Buhl, Idaho, 10-22-11

For lunch and internet service, we stopped at the great sandwich shop we had found in Burley a couple of days earlier. We were able to check email and get some work done.

When we arrived at the church, a pot of decaf coffee and hot water was waiting for us as we arrived. All the beautiful stained glass windows were very inviting. After setting up, we had some extra time and worked on our Bible studies in the sanctuary.

As people began to arrive, they mentioned how happy they were to have us there. We felt so welcomed. The worship attendance has been quite low and they were thrilled we would come. Barb Mix, organist and bell choir director at First Presbyterian Church in Twin Falls, came with her two young grandsons. Phyllis knows Barb quite well from working together with the handbell guild and with MusicFest for 12 -18 year olds in June at College of Southern Idaho. The boys did an awesome job with the sand blocks on *Glory Bound*. During questions, one of them asked, "Why do we celebrate God?" It was a very special moment and another opportunity to tell him and everyone else about God and His love and what He has done for us through Jesus Christ.

After delightful refreshments, we packed up, changed clothes, grabbed dinner at Arctic Circle, and headed for home around 9:00 pm thanking God for the opportunity to share the Gospel through our music.

St. John's Presbyterian Church, Reno, Nevada, 11-2-11

Last year when Sean's College of Idaho choir tour performed at this church, he talked with the music director about us doing a concert. When Phyllis contacted her, she was very excited and worked hard promoting the concert. She directs two large bell choirs at the church plus other vocal choirs.

After a nice drive to Reno, we set up in the beautiful sanctuary. In one hallway is a photo gallery of pastors and we recognized two that we know from churches in Boise and Kendall Presbyteries.

Once a month there is a dinner at the church by the youth to raise money for an all church mission project to Oakland. We enjoyed the November pizza dinner.

This church has a set of chimes so we used them and well as Phyllis's so more could ring at a time. The concert was very well received, and one person commented during the question time that she was experiencing a taste of heaven in the concert.

We stayed with the pastor and his wife who have been at the church for about a year and a half. It was exciting to hear about the mission projects he has done at other churches and is helping to organize for this church.

6th Annual Bells of Christmas “Kettle Konzert,” Nampa Civic Center, Nampa, Idaho, 12-18-11

For the second year, we rented the Nampa Civic Center for our benefit concert for the Nampa Salvation Army. A huge thank you to our concert partners: Idaho Press Tribune, Heart ‘n Home Hospice and Palliative Care, and Ring Praise Music Ministry. Also thank you to our concert sponsors: Rumour’s Hair Design, Donna Watson, stylist; Crossroads Community Church; King’s Pro-Tire Center; Edward Jones, Andy Dodson, Financial Advisor; Saltzer Medical Group; and Jim Waters Insurance. Between all the partners and sponsors and offering from the 350+ people in attendance, we raised \$2,793.37 for the Nampa Salvation Army.

Special guests were SOUNDWAVE!, the advanced handbell choir at Gem State Academy, Caldwell, Idaho, directed by Ben Purvis. They added an incredible energy to the concert as they wowed the audience with their skill and musicality.

Ellissa Nelson, a senior at Gem State Academy, has been taking solo lessons from Phyllis. She joined Phyllis for a duet of *Symphonia on Hyfrydol* and also played a solo, *Christmas Lullaby*. For an encore, Phyllis and Ellissa played the bell tree portion of *Symphonia on Hyfrydol*. To Ellissa’s surprise, a mallet head flew off part way through! We stopped, Phyllis gave her another set of mallets and whispered where to begin, and Sean figured out where they were!

For Sean’s “On the Spot Medley,” each of the main sponsors gave a Christmas song plus Sean could weave in one of his choosing. The medley consisted of *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*, *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*, and *Little Drummer Boy*.

First United Presbyterian Church, Malad City, Idaho, 12-19-11

When we were at this church in October, they asked if we could come for a special Christmas concert. After thinking for a few seconds, we felt that would work and set it for the day after our big fundraising concert for the Nampa Salvation Army at the Nampa Civic Center.

Phyllis has had a solo student, Elissa, since March 2011 who is exceptionally quick at learning pieces with tender musicality. Her parents allowed her to go with us to play the couple of pieces she did in the Nampa Civic Center concert the night before. Her boyfriend also came with us so we were the chaperones! It was so much fun to have them with us and to give Elissa the experience of traveling and playing in a small church setting.

Travel at this time of year can be interesting, and we were blessed with very dry roads. The church was full with 70 people. It was such a joy to see so many people packed into this cute church. They were having a week of special events to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We kicked off the week with our concert. They were then having a vocalist later in the week and a special Christmas Eve candlelight service. For a small congregation, they really band together to share Christ in the community.

With an older building, there is always a need for repair. They had a bake sale after the concert to help with funding to pave the driveway. It currently has a little gravel on it.

We constantly praise God for the talents he has given us and the opportunity to share those talents with His people.