

**Idaho/Montana Tour**  
**April 20-27, 2015**

**Monday, April 20 – Congregational Presbyterian Church, Lewiston, Idaho**

We had a beautiful drive from Nampa/Caldwell up to Lewiston. Phyllis knew the handbell choir director from Area 10 conferences they have attended and was glad when he and the church said yes to a concert. The church had hosted a handbell workshop just over a week before the concert. There had been no events in this region for quite a while and the attendance at that workshop was really good.

The music director is the daughter of good friends with Sean who used to live in Boise. They had a nice visit. The church has a very nice Clavinova keyboard which allowed Sean to use some different sounds on some of the accompaniments. It was a very musically responsive instrument which made his solos showcase the instrument's versatility as well as the expressive way Sean plays.

It is always fun to watch the expressions on people's faces during the Ring Along. This was a very appreciative audience who did a great job ringing, and the adults who played sand blocks seemed to enjoy their special instrument!

After setting up, we were treated to dinner at a local restaurant with the handbell choir director and his wife plus our hosts for the night. It is always great getting the opportunity to visit with the people in the congregation. Phyllis stayed with the Washington State Chair for Handbell Musicians of America Area 10. She is new on the board and they worked together on some guild business. What a great start to our tour!

**Tuesday, April 21 – Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Kalispell, Montana**

We played at this church two years ago when we toured Montana and were delighted to be able to return. The sanctuary has beautiful acoustics which made everything sing out as we spread the Gospel. Besides a grand piano, they have a beautiful organ which Sean used for some of the accompaniments. We so enjoy being able to showcase the instruments in the various churches.

For Sean's improvisation on the cross, he included hymns known well by Lutherans such as "Lift High the Cross." Phyllis has the joy of hearing a different variation of his piece each night. The music director and Sean had a great conversation about improvisation.

There weren't any kids at the concert, but the young at heart adults had a great time with sand blocks during "Glory Bound." A coffee reception afterward gave us the opportunity to visit with a lot of people, some who had heard us before and some for whom this was their first time. Several members of the handbell choir were looking forward to attending the Big Sky Handbell Conference in Helena over the weekend and we told them we would see them at the conference.

Since we didn't have too far to travel the next day, we decided to leave everything at the church that evening and pack up in the morning. After the long drive from Lewiston, it was nice to be able to pack after a good night's rest.

### **Wednesday, April 22 – Mountain Lakes Presbyterian Church, Seeley Lake, Montana**

Phyllis is on the planning team for the annual Wee Kirk (small church) conference in the Pacific Northwest. Last October the conference was on the Oregon coast and the pastor from this church attended. Phyllis had done a short concert as part of the conference. As Phyllis was planning the tour, she remembered there was one pastor from Montana and looked up where Seeley Lake was located discovering that it was right around where they were heading on the tour. A quick email to the pastor came back with Yes! Yes! Yes! and the concert was set.

The log church was built in the early 1950s by skillful timber workers with logs donated by the old Anaconda Company. The communion table, pulpit, and chair as well as all the pews were also handcrafted by local woodworkers. A couple of years ago a fellowship area and office were added on as well as a playground. The church is surrounded by forest and as we were setting up, there were a couple of deer grazing just a few feet from the building. One member enjoys liturgical art and had a beautiful draping of the cross flowing onto the communion table. The photo gallery on their website, [www.mountainlakespreschurch.us](http://www.mountainlakespreschurch.us), shows some of the art. Another member had a lovely grand piano that wasn't being used and donated it to the church.

The pastor has an adorable 5½ year old who joined us for dinner, handed out programs, and drafted "volunteers" for the sand blocks in "Glory Bound." She also really enjoyed ringing a few different sizes of bells as Phyllis helped her. The pastor was concerned how many would attend and was so pleased when we ended up with 27! There is a community handbell choir and several of its members were in attendance. Some of them are also heading to the Big Sky Conference over the weekend. Cookies and coffee were enjoyed by all before and after the concert.

As we were packing up, the pastor commented how much she appreciated the opportunity to just be able to worship during our concert. That is one of our goals. We usually ask the pastor to welcome everyone and open with prayer, but then they get to simply relax and worship.

Besides a beautiful drive along the river, we also saw a wild turkey, deer, and a bear. The bear was on the driver's side of the road heading across just in front of us. We braked as it crossed and watched it head into the woods. It was an awesome, up close experience!

### **Thursday, April 23 – St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Shelby, Montana**

There were two routes to take to get to Shelby – head toward Missoula then east over the mountain and catch the interstate for many miles of plains driving or head back up north and drive along the southern edge of Glacier National Park. We chose option 2 and went into the park for the 9 miles that was open. It is always thrilling to see God's magnificent creation and marvel at His mighty works.

This is another church where we played two years ago, and Phyllis knows the music director very well since they both are on the Handbell Musicians of America Area 10 board. They have a very active music program with a strong bell choir. We joined with them at the Big Sky Conference since a few of their ringers were unable to attend.

As always, people enjoyed the Ring Along, and several adults and the music director's daughter were drafted for sand blocks. The bell choir hosted a wonderful reception afterward, and people really stayed to fellowship with each other.

We stayed with the pastor and his wife. When we were here two years ago, they were just arriving and unable to attend. They were so happy to be there this time and enjoyed it immensely. He is slowly recovering from a broken foot that just doesn't want to heal.

Like in Kalispell, we didn't need to leave early so were able to spend more time visiting with our hosts afterward and packed up in the morning. We followed the music director and her daughter down to the Big Sky Conference and enjoyed lunch together in Great Falls.

### **Friday and Saturday, April 24-25 – Big Sky Conference, Helena, Montana**

Since we were ringing with St. Luke's Lutheran Handbell Choir, we decided to share equipment. There was no sense in them packing bells when we already had a set in the van! So they only needed to bring extra tables, foam, mallets, and chimes to add to what we were already transporting. It was a win-win for everyone.

Lee Afdahl, from Rochester, Minnesota, was the clinician and helped all of us ring nine pieces very musically. With about 280 ringers at the conference, our tables were placed in the front row on one side since Phyllis and Sean were playing their "Trust and Obey" solo during the Saturday afternoon mini concert for all the other ringers. Three other choirs also performed a piece. It is always a great learning experience to ring under the direction of a guest clinician. Since both of us are handbell choir directors and do not ring with another choir, it is good to see how the clinician works out difficult passages to keep everyone together as well as the teaching moments of musicality and interpretation. It also keeps us in tune for what it is like being on the ringers' side of the table and the challenges they have.

For Sunday morning, we decided to attend Covenant United Methodist Church in Helena. They have an active handbell choir, and the main organizer of the Big Sky Conference was from this church. It was a wonderful worshipful time, and Sean was able to spend quite a bit of time with the organist who is the Rodgers Organs representative for the area. What a welcoming and warm congregation!

Since we didn't need to head out of town quite yet, we decided to visit the beautiful Cathedral of St. Helena in downtown Helena. What an impressive sight! We were so thankful that it was open for us to go in and pause in reverence and take in all the stained glass and other elements of the cathedral.

### **Sunday, April 26 – First Baptist Church, Cascade, Montana**

Two years ago we gave our concert as their Sunday evening service and were thrilled to be able to do it again this year. The pastor's four kids were all set to carry in equipment – what a treat! The oldest wanted the biggest item and was surprised when it was light since it was the 3 pieces of foam!

They have done some remodeling in the front of the sanctuary so it was more open and easier to get all our stuff up in the chancel area. It is so nice to have adjustable table legs so the front of the table could extend out over the step and give Phyllis a little more space behind the table. For a small church, there is a very active youth program with 12-18 youth every week. One of the kids memorized the complete book of James and recited it on Easter. What an accomplishment. The kids had a great time with the chimes and practiced the Ring Along before the concert. It is great to see them so excited.

There were seven youth to play the sand blocks during “Glory Bound” and they had the blocks smoking! During questions, one person requested if we could play “Amazing Grace” and we said we'd be happy to play it for an encore. Afterward, one member commented that her cheeks were sore from smiling so much. It is so nice to see people soaking in the music and enjoying the concert.

We had all seven youth wanting to carry everything out to the van afterward – what a treat! Before we left, the pastor, his wife, and a few members asked how they could pray for us. We asked for safe travels and to send the people He wanted to our concerts. We formed a circle and they prayed and sent us out.

Our host was the same person who hosted us two years ago. We had a wonderful time enjoying her company and her two dogs on her beautiful ranch in the mountains.

### **Monday, April 27 – Rigby High School Choir Room, Rigby, Idaho**

In February, Phyllis organized the 1<sup>st</sup> Snake River Handbell Conference in Nampa. The choir director at Rigby High School discovered 3 octaves of handbells sitting unused at the school and wanted to get something started. Knowing nothing about bells, someone told him to contact Phyllis who encouraged him to come to the conference for an intensive hand-on learning experience. He and his wife came and thoroughly enjoyed it. As Phyllis was thinking about where to offer a concert on the route home, she thought it would be great to have one at the school to help raise interest in a handbell class.

The concert was different since it was in a public school. Instead of the typical narrations, we shared other insights about the pieces and the various techniques done with the bells. The kids loved Ring Along and we had enough chimes that they didn't have to trade. The six who volunteered for sand blocks in “Glory Bound” were very enthusiastic and a couple loved posing for pictures! We hope this enthusiasm carries over into the next day when they tell their friends about the concert and when a program begins at the school.

A few years ago Phyllis had worked with the music department at BYU-Idaho when they purchased handbells. The director who is in charge of the bells asked her to refresh her memory about maintenance and also help the student who is in charge of the maintenance learn more about what to do and not do. Since the high school was only about 10 miles away, they were able to come to the school so Phyllis could work with them for a while.

The next morning we headed for home praising God for leading us to each of the churches and guiding us as we shared the Gospel with each audience.