**Patton Tower and the Bells**

The eight tower bells hang in the English style for change ringing. The Tower and Bells are a gift to the community by a bequest of Sadie Smathers Patton. The tower marker reads, “Patton Memorial Tower to the Glory of God in loving memory of Preston Fedelia Patton - Sadie Smathers Patton.” The Whitechapel Bell Foundry cast the bells and supervised the installation. The tower and bells were “dedicated on September 10, 1978.” For services the bells were first rung on Pentecost Sunday, May 14, 1978.

The old bell from the brick tower of the original St. James Church of 1863 is housed as the upper most bell in the present tower. It is used as the Angelus Bell, rung daily morning, noon and night, and as the Sanctus bell during the Holy Eucharist. At the dedication this bell was named ‘William’ in honor of William Theobald who supervised the installation of the bells and was instrumental in the early instruction of Hendersonville ringers.

The tower bells are named: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John for the four Gospels, and Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter recognizing Hendersonville, also called “The City of Four Seasons.”

St. James’ tower bells ring to call people to worship, for special occasions -- joyfully for marriages, solemnly for funerals -- and, at times, to celebrate community events.

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**Change Ringing on Tower Bells**

Change ringers ring a set of tuned bells, usually six or eight, at a steady cadence in a manner that changes the order of the notes in regular patterns. Because of the weight of the bells and the method of hanging, the bells are moved not more than one step earlier or later in the sequence each successive time they sound. Thus, six bells ringing in the order 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 could change to the sequence 2, 1, 4, 3, 6, 5 (where three pairs 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6 switched places) or to the sequence 1, 3, 2, 5, 4, 6 (where the interior pairs 2-3 and 4-5 switched places.) Continuing a series of changes produces a steady flow of notes in changing sequence rather than a melody as one hears on carillon bells.

To achieve the steady cadence requires both a particular technique for the ringers and a special means of hanging the bells. Each bell is mounted on a headstock, which serves as an axle that is supported by bearings on either end. A large wheel is fastened to one end of the headstock, and the bell rope wraps around the outer circumference of the wheel. Wooden parts called the ‘stay’ and ‘slider’ allow the bell to come to a rest in the starting position which is mouth up (exactly opposite of the way one normally thinks of a bell hanging).

Starting from its mouth up position the ringer pulls to start the bell rotating downward and its inertia combined with the force the ringer applied to the rope results in the bell rotating a full circle of 360-degrees. Initially the clapper is following the bell, but as the bell slows toward the end of its rotation the clapper catches up and the bell rings its note. The sound comes out about a second after the ringer started the pull, which would also make ringing a typical melody very difficult. The next pull on the rope causes the bell to reverse its direction of swing, again completing a full circle. Sustained ringing then involves continuing one stroke after the other.

Almost anyone can learn to ring, with the primary requirement some physical coordination -- comparable perhaps to learning to ride a bicycle. With proper technique ringing does not require a great deal of physical effort. Mastering the art of ringing takes learning the skills of basic bell handling, and then practice and focus to ring a bell at the right moment to maintain the steady cadence of quality ringing. Ringing provides an opportunity for service to the church, as well as camaraderie within the local tower and throughout the wide community of ringers. It provides mental stimulus and as someone has written, “The intense concentration required brings a euphoric detachment that cleanses the mind of the day’s petty demands and frustrations.”

Change ringing developed in England by the early 1600’s. While hardware changes result in bells moving more nicely, and the variety and complication of methods has increased significantly, church ringers today are part of a long tradition. There are still thousands of towers in England, we are approaching 50 active towers in North America, and there are a number of towers in countries of the former British Empire.
Ringing Times / More Information

Service ringing: Sundays 10:45-11:10 am
Practices: Saturdays 10:30-noon
Mondays 7:30-9:00 pm
Other occasions as appropriate

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The websites below and their links provide more information about change ringing:

North American Guild of Change Ringers
www.naagcr.org
Click on the top banner on the home page to view videos of change ringing in US towers.

Central Council of Church Bell Ringers
www.cccbr.org.uk
Search YouTube with terms such as: tower bells, change ringing, or campanology, to find a variety of video clips of change ringing. For a YouTube video of our St James Tower see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFn-CqcULgE