

Daily dose of sweetness: Church's new bells ring out, offer reminder of community

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Listen *New bells at Westminster Presbyterian in Minneapolis*



The Rev. Tim Hart-Andersen stands in the rain on the green roof of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis in March, in front of the church's new bells.

Courtesy of the Rev. Tim Hart-Andersen

Videos of quarantined Italians singing on their balconies went viral a few weeks ago — as have similar efforts in the U.S. and around the world.

Now a church in Minneapolis hopes to create its own version of that moment of solidarity by playing its bells.

[Westminster Presbyterian Church in downtown Minneapolis](#) installed the last of its new set of six bells in March, just days before public gathering places like gyms and restaurants were ordered closed by Gov. Tim Walz to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The [installation of the bells](#) had been eight years in the making, from design to installation, and senior pastor Tim Hart-Andersen was anxious to hear them ring.

He particularly wanted to hear the big one, what's known as a bourdon, that weighs 9,400 pounds. So when the bells were tested recently, Hart-Andersen climbed up onto the church's flat, green roof in the rain to witness and listen — you can hear it, too, by clicking the audio player above.

"When it rang, it was more than just hearing. I would say I felt it in my body. I was 50 feet from it, and it was a very deep, sonorous sound wave that hit me both through my ears and through my body," he recalled.

He wasn't the only one. When the test run finished after several minutes, he heard a noise coming from the apartments across the street. Walking carefully to the edge, he saw that "people were out on their balcony. They were cheering, waving, yelling, clapping. I likened it to Italians singing from their quarantined apartments — these were people who had been isolated in their apartments and the bells were reminding them that they were part of a larger community."

Pedestrians cheered. Neighbors emailed and called to say thank you. And, Hart-Andersen shared, one neighbor said he liked the bells — but wanted to know when they would finish, as he was on a conference call. It was downtown Minneapolis on a weekday, and many people were working from home.

With testing complete, the new bells will ring officially for the first time on Sunday, April 12, at 11:30 a.m., following Westminster Presbyterian's Easter service. That service will be held online.

But Hart-Andersen didn't want to stop with that debut. He contacted Rebecca Jorgenson Sundquist, the founder of [City of Bells](#), a nonprofit that restores and coordinates performances of bells in the Twin Cities metro area.

"Bells serve both a civic and a sacred role," said Sundquist. They are "clearly something that brings people together, and during this time of sheltering in place, it's just a wonderful connective tissue ... for our community."

Hart-Andersen plans to ring the bells daily at noon for 15 minutes starting Monday, April 13. Sundquist is working to spread the bell-ringing across the metro and the state. She said the goal is to provide encouragement to anyone who hears it.

Said Hart-Andersen, "We want to remind everybody that's isolated in their homes or apartments that we are one community, and there will be a time when we can come out and become one with each other in person, and to ring out hope and courage to our community every day until we get through this."