

Trinity's Historic Bells Return in October

After an absence of four years the Trinity bell tower will again be filled with the joyous sound of bells that celebrate life of the cathedral and the city. Trinity's 18 historic bells, the first 5 of which were mounted in the tower in 1880, are being renovated and re-tuned to blend harmoniously with six new bells to create a performance-quality carillon of 24 bells.

What is a carillon, you ask? A carillon is one of the largest musical instruments ever built. They can weigh several tons and consist of from 23 to 77 tuned bells (two octaves or more) that are played from a manual keyboard attached to the bells by wire cables that pull iron clappers against the bells. This allows the carillonist to play spiritual and secular music to celebrate the glory of God and to mark the events of city life. So it will be again in San Jose with the new carillon!

ROLE OF A CARILLON IN THE CHURCH AND CITY

Since 1880 Trinity's historic bells have celebrated the glory of God and witnessed the daily life events in the City of San Jose. In times of stress and in times of celebration, Trinity's bells rang out as a powerful symbol of shared and determined spirit in the march of life in the city. The new Trinity Carillon will continue this spiritual and civic role for decades to come.

The bells can provide a much-needed reprieve for busy citizens of San Jose as they hurry about their business. A carillon concert is an opportunity to relax, rejuvenate, reflect and refresh our spirits. We all need a contemplative pause in life from time-to-time. The sound of the bells puts smiles on the faces of passers-by. After a brief pause to enjoy in wonder they continue on their way refreshed. Carillon music belongs to the people. It is absolutely free-of-charge, and a very democratic form of performance!



Carillon bells

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD A CARILLON

Meeks, Watson and Company in Georgetown, Ohio, is the only bell foundry in the United States. They have built and installed carillons for churches and universities throughout Canada and the United States. To give you an idea of what it takes to build a carillon I have included a description of what it took to create Trinity's carillon.

CASTING SIX NEW BELLS

The largest new bell being added weighs 725 pounds and fills a critical missing note in the existing bell instrument. It is the second semi-tone (low E Flat) bell. This bell makes it possible to play a large body of music without the bell ringer having to transpose the music to another key. The other five bells, weighing 87 pounds to 59 pounds, extend the upper range from high G sharp to high C, thereby creating a carillon of two octaves.

The bells were cast from genuine bell bronze metal, approximately 79% copper and 21% tin. They were cleaned and polished to a smooth, satin finish. A traditional bronze patina finish will be applied to the new bells to match more closely the color of the existing bells.



Casting a bell

ANALYZING AND TUNING THE EXISTING BELLS

The original Meneely Bells installed in 1880 have been tuned according to the five-point carillon tuning system, developed long after these bells were cast, so that they will harmonize properly with the other existing bells and the new bells. This will preserve our most historic bells and allow them to take their proper place within the new carillon.