

BELFRY SOCIETY AT SAINT PHILIP THE APOSTLE CHURCH

Have you ever wondered what that ringing sound emanating from Saint Philip the Apostle Church is all about? Like clockwork, our bell is rung by our Saint Philip's Belfry Society before mass every Saturday afternoon at 4:50 and every Sunday morning at 10:20. Once the bell sounds, you have ten minutes to get to church. Whenever the bell is rung, it's often wondered how the sound is perceived by people walking nearby, the café crowds or from those inside their homes across Noe Valley. Hopefully, we are well received.

Members of the Saint Philip's Belfry Society include David Castellanos, Todd Siemers, Bill Yenne, Jane Perry, Mary Staunton, Arturo Pena and Andrew DeGrandi. It is our privilege to serve our community in such unique way— the call to mass.

Historically, there are many traditions involving the ringing of bells in Catholic Churches. Among them is the call to mass, celebrating the election of a new pope, and heralding Holy Days. What is Christmas Eve without bells?

Our specific bell was manufactured in New York State and gifted to Saint Philip's in 1914 by the Cullen family in loving memory of the Rev. Andrew J. Cullen, who founded our parish and who was our pastor from 1910 to 1922. The bell has been with the church ever since. Bill Yenne recalls that when he moved to the hill above the church in 1975, one of his happiest moments was hearing then-pastor Rev. Thomas F. Regan, ringing the bells. However, through the years, the sound of the bell faded away, and was forgotten.

It was in 1994 that Bill and Todd Siemers had a conversation about the sound that was no longer being heard, and decided to investigate. They found that the bell rope had broken, thus rendering the bell mute. They took it upon themselves to change this and climbed up into the belfry to get it ringing again. With a little cleaning, some oil and a couple new ropes, our bell was back in business. They kept the Belfry Society going, and even ran a Belfry Society float in the St. Patrick's Day Parade for several years. In 1995, they won a first place plaque. Bill rang our bell to celebrate the election of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

Gradually though, interest once again began to wane and the bells were heard with lessened frequency. Then, new blood flowed into the parish, and in June 2010, David Castellanos stepped up to revive the Belfry Society. He met Bill and Todd, and brought others in to resurrect this community service, and our bell celebrated Pope Francis in 2013.

As David notes, "the bells are our gift to our community, similar to the church bells of Europe. Though we ring for more solemn occasions such as funerals, generally, we view it to be our community ministry to provide a happy sound as a calling card that St. Philip's is here, ready to offer mass and other religious services."