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The Village Ringers rehearse Monday at New Covenant United Methodist Church for their upcoming season. The group's holiday show, "Starry Night," is at 7 p.m. Dec. 8 at the church, and tickets will be available for purchase soon.

Handbell Choir Assembles Ahead of Holiday Season

With 13 women participating this year, the Village Ringers practice regularly at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

By **JAMES DINAN**
Daily Sun Senior Writer

It's the first day of practice for The Village Ringers at New Covenant United Methodist Church, and the group's president and music director, Bonnie Fisher, is making sure her team of 13 women have what it takes to participate in the group's holiday

show, "Starry Night," at 7 p.m. on Dec. 8 at the church.

"We have a great squad this year," said Fisher, of the Village of Piedmont. She is friendly, yet stern as she goes over each and every song The Village Ringers will perform that night.

"We'll start at Part 49," Fisher tells the group. "Remember to take it slow and thank you!"

It was a few hours earlier that Fisher held auditions for The

Village Ringers at the church. For the first time in her memory, this year's Ringers are all female.

"For as long as I can remember, we had two men each year. They were always able to put everything away when our practice was over," Fisher laughed. "We'll be able to do it this year, I guarantee it."

Unlike other bell choirs in the area, The Village Ringers are not a

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church group. For the last four years, the group has practiced and performed at New Covenant UMC. Some Village Ringers lead or are part of church bell choirs in the region, including St. George Episcopal Church in The Villages and First Presbyterian Church of Leesburg.

"We are blessed that New Covenant UMC hosts our practices and concerts, but we are not affiliated with them," Fisher said.

Before Monday afternoon's first practice of the season, The Village Ringers held its annual auditions at the church. Fisher said there were plenty of things to handle during the audition.

"There were some simple warmup exercises, then auditioners were asked to sight-read at least three pieces," she said. "The selections will be portions of actual pieces we'll be performing in our Christmas concert."

Auditioners were also judged on their ability to sight-read; control of their bell/circular motion; knowledge and use of special techniques such as mart, echo, and mallets; and their performance presence, such as looking up, smiling, and confidence. After the auditions, participants were notified by email if they made The Village Ringers. About an hour after the emails were sent, the first practice began.

Donna Kagan, of the Village of Pinellas, is a member of this season's Ringers and served as an at-large member of the Ringers Board of Directors for 2025-26.

"The first practice was quite exciting," she said. "I can't wait before we participate for Starry Night in December."

Starry Night features The Village Ringers in a special star-themed show where



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Lana McKinzie, of the Village of Polo Ridge, rehearses Monday with the Village Ringers at New Covenant United Methodist Church for their upcoming season.

every song they perform has the word "star" in the title.

"Everybody will be wearing star shirts and we'll be performing in front of a special star screen," Fisher said. "The audience will be sitting at tables for the first time for a Village Ringers show. We're even going to be offering star-shaped snacks, and audience participation will be highly encouraged."

The Village Ringers warmed up before dismissal Monday by performing several holiday favorites, including "Joy to the World," "Deck the Halls," "Angels We Have Heard on High," and "Jingle Bells." Despite the Ringers planning two concerts in December and next spring, weekly practices are quite important as few members have their own bells, and they

can be quite expensive.

"We store the bells at New Covenant UMC, but room for them can be quite difficult, and storage can be tricky," Fisher said. "Without these practices, it can be difficult to perform at our best, although we sounded fine after just one practice."

The Village Ringers meets from 1-3 p.m. Mondays at New Covenant United Methodist Church, 3470 Woodridge Dr., The Villages, behind the Buffalo Ridge Publix. Learn more at villageringers.com.

Starry Night will take place at 7 p.m. Dec. 8 at the church. Tickets will be available for purchase soon at ncumcfl.com/concerts.

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