



Solstice Bells

A Guidebook

DECEMBER 21, 2026



I A Sound We Share

For thousands of years, people have gathered to mark the turning of the seasons.

We have watched the sun rise and set. We have gathered around fires, sung songs, told stories, and listened for signs that the world is changing.

And we have rung bells.

Bells have called people to prayer, welcomed new life, sounded warnings, celebrated victories, and honored those who have died. Their sound has given expression to our deepest human experiences: our joys, our sorrows, our hopes, and our longing to belong.

On December 21, 2026, the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, we invite people everywhere to join in a shared global experience of light, sound, and human connection.



THE WINTER SOLSTICE

The longest night of the year, and the beginning of the journey toward longer days.

Wherever we live, we share the same planet, the same sun, and the rhythms of a changing world. Whether you gather with thousands of people or ring a single bell at home, you are part of Solstice Bells.

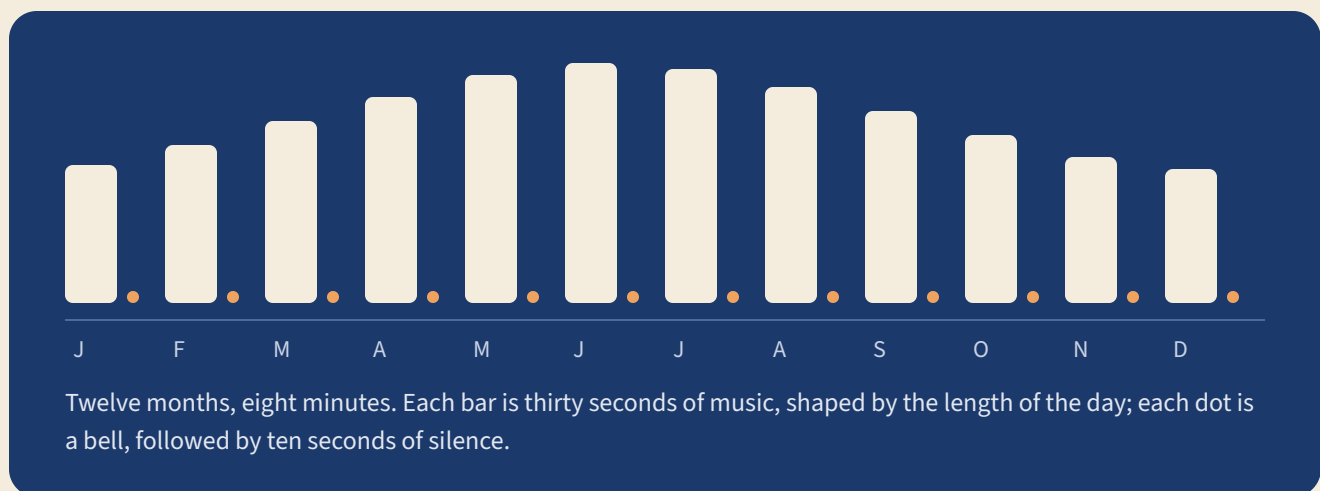
You do not need a special kind of bell. You do not need to be a musician. You do not need to belong to a particular religion or tradition.

All you need is a willingness to gather, ring, listen, and create a sound of hope.

How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is a collection of possibilities.

At the heart of every Solstice Bells gathering is *A Composition Written by Light*, an eight-minute musical journey through twelve months of the year. Each month is represented by thirty seconds of music followed by the ringing of bells, and then ten seconds of silence. The composition provides a shared experience connecting participants across the world.



Everything surrounding the music is yours to shape.

BEFORE

Begin with a poem, a reading about hope, a moment of silence, or a reflection on someone for whom you wish to ring.

THE MUSIC

The composition and the ringing of bells: eight minutes shared with gatherings around the world.

AFTER

Share a blessing, invite participants to name their hopes, or let the gathering end in quiet reflection.

Choose what speaks to you. Adapt what you find. Bring your own cultural traditions, stories, and creativity.

There is no single right way to gather.

2 Three Invitations

Three simple invitations give every Solstice Bells gathering a common thread.



I Gather To...

Connect, celebrate, heal, give thanks, or stand with others.



I Ring For...

Someone or something I want to remember, honor, celebrate, or hold in hope.



I Bring Home...

A hope, an intention, a renewed connection, or something I want to carry into the coming year.

LEADER NOTE Participants may reflect on these invitations silently, share responses aloud, or write their thoughts on a card.

The questions do not require everyone to have the same beliefs, experiences, or reasons for gathering.

Their purpose is to help each person discover meaning within a shared experience.

3 Before the Music

Gathering, Listening, Preparing

READ ALOUD

SUGGESTED OPENING READING

We Gather

Across the world, people are gathering.
Some in places filled with light. Others beneath the longest night.
Some come with joy. Others carry grief.
Some have gathered to celebrate. Others to remember.

We come from different places, speak different languages, and carry different stories.

Yet we share one planet. One sun. One experience of time moving through our lives.

And today, we share a sound.

The sound of bells. A sound that can call us to remember, to listen, to celebrate, and to hope.

Welcome to Solstice Bells.

Preparing to Listen

Before beginning the composition, invite participants to consider two questions:



I Gather To...

What has brought you here today?



I Ring For...

Who or what would you like to honor with the sound of a bell?

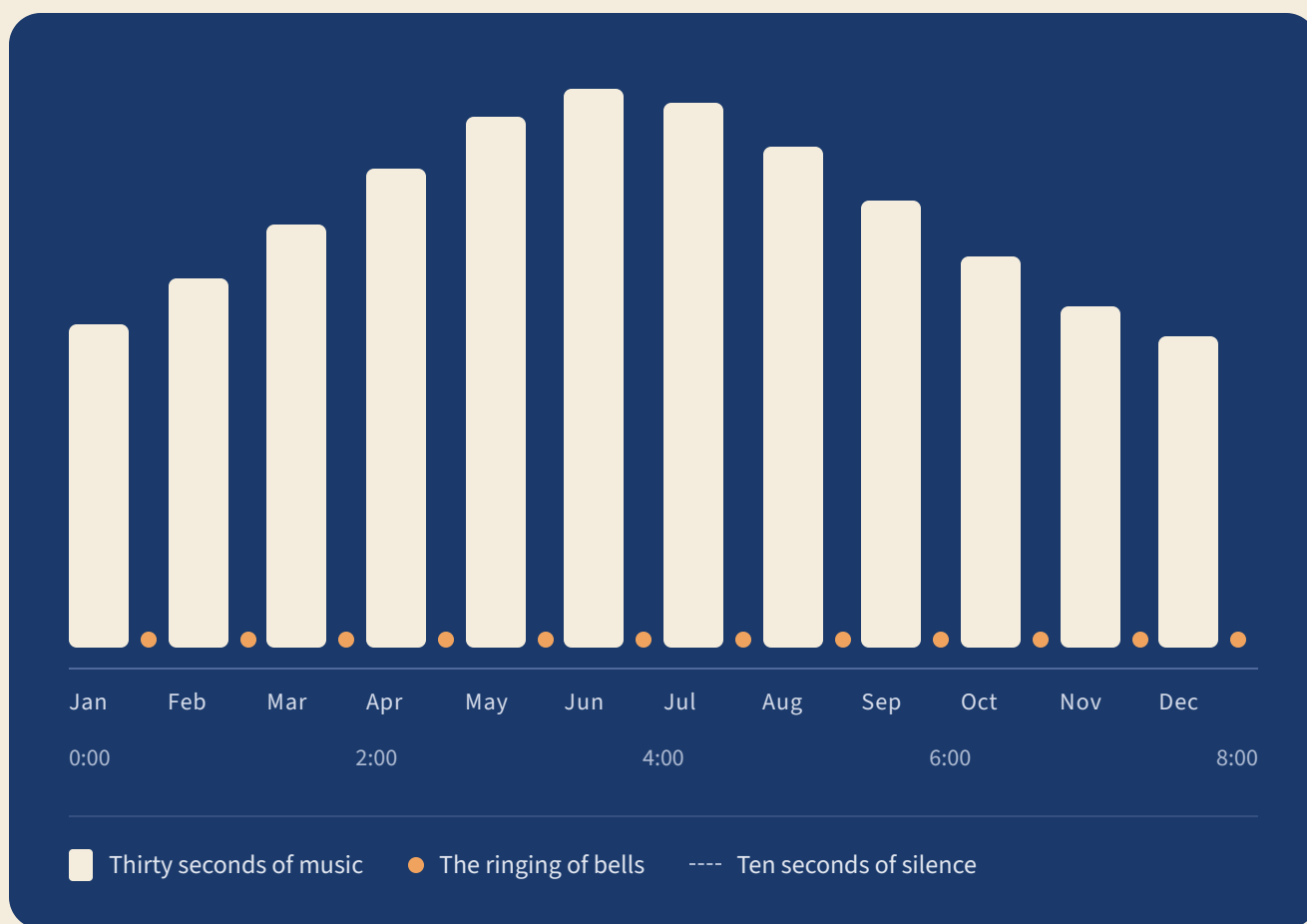
LEADER NOTE Allow a brief period of silence. Participants may share if they wish. An optional poem or reading from Part Three may be offered before the music begins.

4 A Composition Written by Light

Twelve Months, Eight Minutes

At the center of every gathering is an original musical composition inspired by the changing length of daylight throughout the year.

The experience moves through twelve months. Each month brings thirty seconds of music, followed by the ringing of bells, and then ten seconds of silence. The composition lasts eight minutes.



The music invites us to experience the passage of time, the changing seasons, and the interplay between sound and silence.

Introducing the Music

READ ALOUD

SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION

We are about to experience an entire year in eight minutes.
Twelve months. Twelve short pieces of music.

Between each piece, there will be an opportunity to ring the bells
you have brought, followed by ten seconds of silence.

As the music unfolds, you may remember specific moments from
the past year. People you have loved. Changes you experienced.
Times of joy. Times of sorrow. Moments that surprised you.
Moments that changed you.

During the silences, you may remember, pray, reflect, or simply
listen.

There is nothing you need to accomplish.

Invite the music, sound of bells, and the silence to become a part
of your Solstice Bells journey.



PLAY THE COMPOSITION

Play *A Composition Written by Light*. Allow the full eight minutes to unfold without interruption.

6 After the Music

Reflecting, Remembering, Bringing Home

READ ALOUD

SUGGESTED READING

The Sound Continues

A bell rings. For a moment, the air around us changes.

Something that was silent becomes sound.

Something that was still begins to move.

And then the sound travels. Beyond the bell. Beyond the person who rang it.

Beyond the circle of people gathered nearby.

Perhaps that is what hope does.

It begins somewhere. In a word. In a kindness. In a memory.

In the courage to reach toward another person.

And then it travels.

The bells will eventually grow quiet.

But what they awaken within us can continue.

A Moment of Reflection



I Bring Home...

What will you carry with you from this gathering?

Perhaps gratitude

Perhaps courage

A renewed commitment to kindness

A memory you want to honor

A connection you want to strengthen

LEADER NOTE Participants may respond silently, share a word, or write a personal intention. A closing poem, blessing, or reading from Part Five may conclude the gathering.

PART THREE

A Treasury of Readings and Reflections



The following collection offers poems, quotations, reflections, and questions that communities may use before or after the musical composition.

Choose one or two selections that speak to the character of your gathering.

7 Light and Darkness

8 Hope and New Beginnings

9 Bells, Sound, and Resonance

10 Peace and Human Connection

11 Remembrance, Gratitude, and
Healing

12 Wonder and the Natural World

13 Questions for Meditation and
Reflection

7 Light and Darkness

Light and Love

Martin Luther King Jr. · *Strength to Love* (1963)

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.”



REFLECT

Where might you bring light into a situation marked by conflict, fear, or division?

LEADER NOTE A reading before the music, followed by silence.



Light Creating Light

Paulo Coelho ·

“The purpose of light is to create more light, to open people's eyes, to reveal the marvels around.”



REFLECT

Who has brought light into your life? How might you pass that light to someone else?

8 Hope and New Beginnings

Anthem

Leonard Cohen · from *The Future* (1992)



*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light get in*



REFLECT

Where might hope find its way into an unfinished or uncertain part of your life?

LEADER NOTE An opening reading before the composition.



Ring Out, Wild Bells

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

From *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1850)

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, **ring in** the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, **ring in** the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Excerpt: stanzas 1 to 7 of 8.



REFLECT

What would you like to ring out of the world? What would you like to ring in?

I RING OUT...

I RING IN...

LEADER NOTE Invite participants to name something they hope to release and something they hope to welcome.

Inviting the Bell

Thich Nhat Hanh



*Body, speech, and mind
In perfect oneness
I send my along with the sound
of this bell.
May the hearers awaken from their
forgetfulness and transcend
the path of anxiety and sorrow.*



REFLECT

What becomes possible when we become quiet enough to listen?

SUGGESTED RITUAL Invite participants to listen to a gently sounded bell until its vibrations fade away.

PART FOUR

Creating Your Own Gathering



One person and one bell can be a meaningful Solstice Bells gathering.

14 Choosing a Place and Bringing People Together

15 Gathering Ideas for Different Communities

16 Incorporating Poetry, Music, and Local Traditions

17 Sharing Your Stories: Photography, Video, and Sound

I4 Choosing a Place

and Bringing People Together

A Solstice Bells gathering can take place almost anywhere.



A home



A school



A sanctuary



A hospital



A garden



A village square



A concert hall



A community center



Beneath the stars

Choose a setting that feels welcoming and appropriate for your participants. Consider the number of people you expect, accessibility, weather, seating, sound levels, and the practical needs of those attending. If your gathering is outdoors or in a shared public space, consider the people nearby and any local requirements for public events.



There is no minimum number of participants. One person and one bell can be a meaningful Solstice Bells gathering.

A Few Practical Suggestions

- ☐ Identify someone who can welcome participants and introduce the experience.
- ☐ Have bells or other appropriate ringing instruments available.
- ☐ Leave enough time for silence and reflection.
- ☐ Ensure the musical composition can be heard clearly.
- ☐ Choose one or two readings from the handbook.
- ☐ Allow participants to decide whether they wish to speak or remain quiet.

15 Gathering Ideas

for Different Communities



For Remembrance

Invite participants to bring the name or photograph of someone they wish to honor. Offer a short reading on memory, loss, or enduring love. Participants may ring a bell in remembrance.



For Peace

Bring together people from different backgrounds and traditions. Invite brief words of hope or peace in different languages. Allow the ringing of bells to become an expression of shared solidarity.



For Children

Explore the science of sound. Why do bells ring? What makes different bells sound different? How do vibrations travel? Invite children to create or decorate simple bells and share what gives them hope.



For Healing

In hospitals, hospices, care communities, or quiet spaces, a gentle bell can offer a moment of comfort and reflection. Use sound levels appropriate for the setting, and allow alternatives for anyone who finds ringing uncomfortable.



A Community Celebration

Invite choirs, musicians, artists, dancers, or storytellers to contribute. The Solstice Bells composition and ringing can serve as the shared centerpiece of a larger event.



A Gathering for One

Find a quiet place.
Listen to the composition.
Think of someone or something you wish to honor.
Ring your bell.
Consider what you will bring home.

16 Poetry, Music, and Tradition

Incorporating Poetry, Music, and Local Traditions

Every community brings its own cultural heritage, traditions, and ways of celebrating. Solstice Bells welcomes those differences.



Poets and storytellers

A local poet, a short story, a seasonal ritual, or a reading in more than one language.



Musicians

A traditional song, or a performance before or after the central composition.



Artists

Works inspired by light, bells, or the changing seasons.



AT THE CENTER

The composition and the ringing of bells, shared by every gathering.



Schools

Invite students to write poems or reflections.



Faith communities

Prayers and blessings appropriate to their traditions.



Secular gatherings

Readings and meditations that suit the people gathered.

The goal is not to make every gathering identical.

It is to create a shared experience that welcomes many different expressions of meaning.

17 Sharing Your Stories

Photography, Video, and Sound

Every bell has a story. Every gathering has a story worth sharing.

We invite participants to document their Solstice Bells experience through photographs, short videos, audio recordings, or written reflections.

Three Storytelling Questions



I Gather To...

Why did you participate?



I Ring For...

Who or what did you honor?



I Bring Home...

What will you carry forward?

Ideas for Capturing Your Gathering

-  Photograph the place where your gathering takes place.
-  Record a short clip of the ringing of bells.
-  Invite a participant to share why the experience matters to them.
-  Record the sounds of bells from your community.
-  Capture a brief reflection about what participants hope to bring home.



Always obtain appropriate permission before recording or sharing identifiable people or personal stories. With participants' consent, selected stories may become part of a future Solstice Bells exhibition or documentary celebrating the voices and experiences of communities around the world.



Share your story

[SOLSTICEBELLS.ORG](https://solsticebells.org)

PART FIVE

What We Carry Forward



*Somewhere else on this planet, another person has rung a bell
for reasons not so different from our own.*

18 I Bring Home... A Final Invitation

19 Closing Readings and Blessings

20 Staying Connected with Solstice Bells

I8 I Bring Home...

A Final Invitation

The ringing eventually ends.

The final notes disappear into the air.

We return to our homes, our work, our families, and our daily lives.

But perhaps something remains.

✦ A memory

✦ A renewed connection

✦ A name spoken aloud

✦ A promise to begin again

An awareness that somewhere else on this planet, another person has rung a bell for reasons not so different from our own.

Before leaving your gathering, consider one final question:



I Bring Home...

What hope, intention, or connection will you carry into the days ahead?

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You may wish to write your response, share it with another person, or simply keep it in your heart. The card above can be cut out and taken home.

19 Closing Readings and Blessings

READ ALOUD

CLOSING BLESSING

Carry the Light

May we leave this gathering with a greater awareness of the world around us.
May we recognize the beauty we sometimes overlook.
May we remember those whose lives have shaped our own.
May we find courage to welcome new beginnings.
And may we carry something of this moment into the days ahead.

A little more kindness. A little more curiosity.
A little more compassion. *A little more light.*

*The sound of the bells will fade.
But the hope they awaken can travel with us.*

OPTIONAL CLOSING RITUAL

A Final Bell

- 1 Invite participants to stand or sit together for one final moment of silence.
- 2 One person rings a bell.
- 3 Everyone listens until the sound fades.
- 4 The gathering concludes.



Staying Connected with Solstice Bells

Solstice Bells is an invitation to create connections that reach beyond a single moment.

We hope that the stories, music, reflections, and relationships formed through this experience will continue to inspire communities around the world.

We invite you to share your gathering, explore the stories of others, and stay connected as Solstice Bells develops future artistic, educational, and community experiences.



Learn more, participate, and share your story

solsticebells.org

One Planet. One Moment.
Hope Has a Sound.

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