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## **Overview of the Handbell Group Alpha 4**

Alpha 4 is a Four-in-Hand Handbell Choir from Gaithersburg, Maryland that utilizes the interlocking handbell style of ringing along with several other techniques. This group includes director, arranger and ringer Pam Ion in addition to the ringers Kristine Farrell, Nita Roff, Laura Staley and Kathy Stauffer.

All of the members of Alpha 4 began playing in the First Baptist Church of Gaithersburg (FBCG) Sanctuary Handbells, which is a 4-octave handbell choir. A 2001 handbell clinic taught by Christine Anderson, a professional interlocking handbell ringer, planted the seed for Alpha 4. After attending this seminar, five members of the FBCG Sanctuary Handbell Choir came together to learn this interlocking handbell technique. Interlocking the bells allows each member to play with two to three bells in each hand meaning that each person is holding and playing anywhere from four to six bells at once.

Alpha 4 enjoys trying new and different techniques. In addition to playing interlocking bells, members also play what is referred to as “on the table”. This means that the four players will share and play several dozen bells in one musical piece.

The repertoire of the group includes classical, seasonal, patriotic, folk, hymns, wedding, sacred and secular music. Pam Ion also arranges music for hard to find pieces making the group’s repertoire diverse and interesting.

Alpha 4 has performed at weddings, senior-living facilities, nursing homes, shopping malls and worship services.

The ‘Alpha’ in the name refers to the group’s status as the beginning of interlocking handbell ringing at the First Baptist Church of Gaithersburg. The ‘4’ refers to the interlocking bell technique itself, which is also popularly known as “four-in-hand.”

For more information go to [www.alpha4handbells.org](http://www.alpha4handbells.org).

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