

Threshold Choir Ancient Tradition Finds a Voice at Hospice

Just as babies are welcomed into the world to the sound of lullabies, a soothing song of farewell is now available to patients whose families request a visit from the Hospice threshold choir. Comprised of women who are Hospice of Northwest Ohio employees and volunteers, the choir honors an ancient tradition in which singing feminine voices bring tranquility to dying persons shortly before they cross the threshold to depart this life.

Each Experience Unique

"When we are invited to a bedside," says Amey Raihala, RN, CHPN, "we visit in small groups. We invite families and caregivers to join in or to simply participate by listening. We choose songs to respond to the patient's musical taste and spiritual direction and do everything from rounds, chants and lullabies...to hymns, spirituals or choral music. The response from families — who feel the music brings a profound sense of peace to their dying loved ones as well as themselves — has been extremely positive and heartfelt."

Adds choir volunteer Denise Martin, "We're observing that the choir is also appreciated by patients who

are not imminently dying. While rehearsing recently," she explains, "our music drifted down the hallway and one of the patients said she loved our music but wanted the 'volume turned up.' We ended up singing to this very alert, sweet lady, which shows our music can benefit patients in all stages of care."

Also a Comfort for Staff

"As a volunteer," adds Denise, "I often smile and think that the staff needs this as much as the families. They're so dedicated and love their patients and want to do everything possible for them. In especially difficult cases, the choir is one more thing they can offer, which ultimately makes the nurses feel better, too."

Concurs Amey, "The staff who sing do view the choir as another way to tend to patients' needs and make them comfortable. The songs touch something in each of us; the words are simple, yet bring up emotions often hidden. We offer the music as a gift to patients and families and leave it to touch them however it may." ■



Denise Martin feels what it is like to be surrounded by song. Fellow threshold choir members include, from left, Linda Winger, Theresa Kusner, Lynne Dunlap, Christina Hulbirt and many others.