

Chapter History of the Great Lakes Erie Threshold Choir

2025

Founding and Early Years

The Great Lakes Erie Threshold Choir was founded in late 2013 under the coordination of Linda Williams, with guidance from Cindy Harris, Director of the Pittsburgh Threshold Singers. Their mission quickly took root, and by June 2014, the choir sang to its very first client. Since then, the chapter has offered comfort through song to more than 300 individuals and their families. These moments have taken place in private homes and extended care facilities, always at the invitation and convenience of the client or their loved ones.

Purpose and Outreach

Although the choir is sometimes invited to sing at funerals and memorial services—such as the spring and fall memorials sponsored by UPMC Hamot’s Family Hospice—it does not consider itself a performance choir. Instead, its focus remains on intimate, bedside singing. On occasion, the group participates in community events, offering “song baths” at health fairs and similar venues. These experiences serve both as a way to share their mission with the public and as an invitation for new singers to join.

Membership and Structure

Membership in the choir has fluctuated over the years, with some singers traveling south for the winter months. Three of the founding members attended workshops in Ohio led by Kate Munger, the founder of Threshold Choir International. At present, the roster includes eight active members, two retired members, and two new singers in training. Because bedside singing is typically done in trios—covering melody, high, and low parts—new members are encouraged to learn at least two parts to make forming triads easier.

The Music and Its Meaning

The choir’s music is created with a single purpose: to bring comfort. Many of the songs are written by members of Threshold Choir International and are intentionally soothing and unfamiliar, designed to avoid triggering difficult memories. At the same time, the choir honors personal requests whenever possible. Beloved hymns, favorite songs, holiday tunes, and even military anthems are woven into their repertoire when they hold special meaning for clients and families. The choir’s guiding principle is inclusivity, offering service to people of all races, creeds, ethnicities, and orientations.

Becoming a Member

Joining the choir requires only a few essentials: the ability to carry a tune, hold one’s part against other harmonies, and convey presence and kindness through song. Because the group often sings for Hamot’s Family Hospice patients, members must also follow the requirements of both the hospice agency and the facilities they visit. The choir rehearses weekly as a group, while bedside trios rehearse together just before a sing. Flexibility is key, as schedules are arranged around the needs of clients and families. On average, the choir sings at two bedside visits each month and participates in four memorial or funeral services each year. Prospective singers are always welcome to attend rehearsals before deciding to join.

A Shared Blessing

For members, the experience of singing is deeply rewarding. Choir member Ginny Haraldson captures the sentiment shared by many: "Singing with the Threshold Choir is a blessing to me. I love singing, and choir allows me to share that love with others and to feel a way that I've never felt before. If we can help the family and the patient feel better, even if only for a moment, we are all blessed."

L-R: Sandra Shouse, Victoria Brogdon, Linda Williams, Carol George, Kathleen Johnson, Kathy Hull, Ginny Haraldson, and Kirsten George (seated)

