

Chapter History of Hospicare Threshold Singers, Ithaca NY

2025

Hospicare Threshold Singers of Ithaca is a small self-directed group of singers who sing primarily to hospice patients, but also to others upon request. All singers are members of Threshold Choir and are trained and approved volunteers of Hospicare & Palliative Care Services of Ithaca.

Origins and Founding

The group was founded by Jayne Demakos—a music thanatologist, harpist, singer, and choir director—who served as a staff musician at Hospicare. Jayne led several singing groups and, in 2017, announced the formation of a Threshold Choir. Many participants came from her existing ensembles, joined by new voices from the community.

Jayne cultivated a choir that met twice monthly and performed at public Hospicare events. She conducted informal auditions to assess vocal blend and harmony skills, though reading music or prior choir experience was not required. The group grew to about 20 members, singing a mix of Threshold Choir songs, Gregorian and contemporary chants, and beloved classics.

Gradually, Jayne invited small groups to sing with her in nursing home common areas and occasionally for individual patients. In 2017, members began the training required to become certified hospice volunteers—a state requirement for those working directly with hospice patients. By 2018, a few singers were authorized to lead bedside singing sessions for patients selected by Jayne, though she continued to handle all clinical reports.

Transition and Growth

In summer 2019, Jayne left Hospicare. The group responded by forming a steering committee and becoming fully self-directed in both musical and organizational matters. They chose to remain affiliated with Hospicare and continued as an independent chapter of the Threshold Choir. This connection provides clarity of mission, patient referrals, rehearsal space, and public visibility through Hospicare-sponsored events.

Adapting Through the Pandemic

Coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the group reorganized and adapted quickly. Weekly meetings continued via Zoom or outdoors when possible. They also created two virtual “song baths,” which Hospicare broadcast to the wider community.

Since then, the group has maintained a steady membership of 10–12 singers. Formal rehearsals are held twice a month at the Hospicare residence and are co-led by rotating members. Without a designated music director, the group emphasizes peer support, trio practice, and welcoming

new members. On alternate weeks, they host informal “social sings” in members’ homes to learn new songs and deepen their musical connection.

Singing Contexts

Hospicare Threshold Singers offer music in the following settings:

- By referral from Hospicare for patients at home, in care facilities, or at the Hospicare residence
- Upon request, for individuals not affiliated with Hospicare who seek a Threshold visit
- Monthly visits to the Hospicare residence to sing for any patient who wishes to hear music in their room

Community Connections

Hospicare Threshold Singers has developed a “sister” relationship with the Threshold Singers of Rochester. Together, they’ve hosted several retreats between the two cities. Once or twice a year, the Welcome Center in Geneva, NY comes alive with shared songs, stories, and growing friendships.

04/14/2024. Deborah Berman, MJ Erickson-Eger, Jessica Franken, Arlene Hewitt
Pamela Lillard, Susanne Morgan, Sara Schaffzin, Renate Schmitt, Karen K. Smith, Angela Tarrer, Paula Winner



10/13/2025. MJ Erickson-Eger, Arlene Hewitt, Carol Laborie, Pamela Lillard, Candace Mingins, Susanne Morgan, Renate Schmitt, Karen K Smith, Angela Tarrer



