

Chapter History of South Jersey Threshold Singers

2025

Origins and Shared Vision

In early 2022, Marie and Emilie met while singing in the soprano section of a masterworks choir in South Jersey. Marie told Emilie about her involvement with the Philadelphia Threshold Singers and her long-held dream to start a Threshold chapter where none yet existed in South Jersey. Emilie, having read about Threshold years earlier in the Philadelphia Inquirer, quickly agreed to join Marie as a co-leader and turn that dream into a shared mission.

Thanks to Marie's years of experience as a hospice nurse, her prior work with the Philadelphia Threshold Singers, and her energetic drive, the chapter came together quickly. Marie arranged an initial meeting with the local hospice where she had worked and recruited a familiar choral singer who would become their next member. That new member in turn recruited others; with guidance from their coach Cathy and the resources available on the Threshold website, the chapter was formally launched within months.

First Rehearsal and Early Service

The chapter held its first rehearsal in June 2022 with six attendees and expanded steadily from there. During that summer, members completed the volunteer requirements necessary to serve at the hospice. By fall 2022 the singers began bedside groups of four in the hospice in-patient unit, quickly increasing to about six sings per month across two in-patient units.

Broader Community Engagement

Beyond the primary hospice, the chapter accepted requests to sing in other settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, private residences, and memorial services. They also maintained periodic collaborations with the Philadelphia Threshold Singers, most recently performing together before a Philadelphia Theatre Company production titled *Night Side Songs*. These engagements broadened the chapter's reach and reinforced connections with neighboring Threshold communities.

Membership and Growth

Membership fluctuated over time but stabilized around a roster of approximately 15 people, with about 12 actively participating in the singing schedule. Growth came through word-of-mouth, the Threshold website, and a volunteer presentation at the hospice. New members are welcomed year-round and encouraged to attend rehearsals and practice independently to integrate quickly into the group.

Rehearsal Rhythm

The chapter established a consistent rehearsal schedule of three sessions per month: two daytime rehearsals that attract most members and one evening rehearsal for those who cannot attend daytime sessions or who seek extra practice. This rhythm supports readiness for bedside sings and accommodates varied schedules among volunteers.

Leadership and Roles

Leadership follows a simple, collaborative model. Two leaders plan rehearsals, schedule sings—typically one month in advance for the partner hospice—and share administrative tasks according to availability. Four members currently serve as bedside song leaders. One member frequently arranges requested non-Threshold songs for two- or three-part singing and helps lead at rehearsals, while another manages technology, helping the group store and access songs on tablets. Members generally step in to assist wherever needed.

Enduring Commitment and Impact

Six founding members from the summer of 2022 remain actively involved, including Marie and Emilie. Three members who had been active with Philadelphia Threshold Singers are not presently active there due to personal circumstances but continue to contribute locally. All participants describe their work with the chapter as profoundly touching and deeply rewarding, sustained by a shared commitment to bringing gentle song to those at the end of life.

Holiday Party 2023. Polly Rovins, Emilie Oberstaedt, Lauren Greenberg, Joan Zumoff, Terry Savage, Dinah Majure, Deborah MacBride, Marie Ford, Jeanne Sundberg



Holiday party 2024. Jeanne Sundberg, Deborah MacBride, Joan Zumoff, Marie Ford, Lauren Greenberg, Polly Rovins, Nancy Masarek, Linda Barbour, Dinah Majure, Emilie Oberstaedt

