

CHAPTER HISTORY OF BRIDGE TO PEACE THRESHOLD CHOIR

Chapter Beginnings

The Bridge to Peace Threshold Choir (BPTC) traces its roots back to the Calgary Threshold Choir, founded in 2014 under the leadership of Agnieszka Wolska. Supported by Threshold Choir International, the early chapter received mentorship, songs, and guidance.

When Agnieszka began a full-time Master's program in 2016, the chapter experimented with a shared leadership model. Despite many efforts, the structure proved challenging, and Threshold Choir International became involved in helping navigate the difficulties. In May 2017, members agreed that Agnieszka would remain the sole director of the Calgary chapter.

At the same time, a new chapter—Bridge to Peace—was formed with a leadership circle model designed to distribute responsibilities and draw on the strengths of multiple people. Although the intention was for singers to participate in either or both chapters once Agnieszka completed her studies, she ultimately chose to fold the Calgary Threshold Choir in July 2017.

Membership

By its current chapter year, BPTC includes 12 active members, ten of whom regularly sing at bedsides or offer song baths. Eight of the original singers remain active, reflecting the group's strong continuity and shared commitment. Members come from a wide range of professions—teachers, nurses, accountants, technical writers, social workers, and more. Many are retired, while five continue to work full or part time. The chapter includes two active male singers and welcomes anyone willing to uphold the choir's mission.

Most new singers learn of Threshold Choir through word of mouth, from current and past members, hearing the choir sing in service and, occasionally, from the BPTC website. The choir also has a Facebook page.

Practice and Service

To maintain their musical consistency, members rehearse every Wednesday, taking approximately four weeks off each year. When weather or road conditions are poor, the group seamlessly shifts from in-person practice to Zoom.

BPTC's core service is bedside singing, offered monthly at a hospice and a long-term care facility. The choir also provides song baths, including a cherished monthly offering at Wellspring Alberta, an organization supporting people living with cancer. Their presence there is met with deep gratitude from both participants and staff. The choir also responds to individual requests for singing, extending comfort wherever it is needed.

Memorable Venues and Chapter Lore

Over the years, BPTC has sung in a variety of remarkable and sometimes challenging settings. Among the most memorable was the Equinox Vigil, held in a historic graveyard to honor life's transitions with compassion and creativity. Singing outdoors in downtown Calgary during the September equinox brought unpredictable weather—and unexpected noise.

One year, the choir found itself competing with a monster truck rally roaring nearby, a moment that became part of chapter lore: *if they could sing through monster trucks, they could sing*

anywhere. Another Vigil brought extreme cold and snow, prompting singers to don snowpants, toques, heavy gloves, and scarves. Their music director famously brought a microwave and bean bags to keep singers and listeners warm.

The choir was also invited to sing at the closing session of *Good Grief! Walking with Grief and Loss*, where participants ended their walk by reclining under a canopy in sacred lawn furniture as the choir sang to them.

Workshops and Learning

BPTC typically hosts an annual Bedside Training workshop and a singing workshop. Past highlights include sessions on Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), LGBTQ2S+ issues at end of life, Psychedelic Mushroom Therapy, and Living with Grief. These workshops reflect the choir's commitment to understanding the diverse experiences of those they serve.

Community and Social Life

Beyond singing, the choir thrives on connection. Members gather for at least two social events each year—often potlucks at a member's home. Karaoke nights have become a beloved tradition, filled with laughter and shared joy.

Leadership and Governance

BPTC operates with an elected Leadership Circle (LC) of four positions, each with specific and shared responsibilities. The Managing Director plays a key role in keeping the organization running smoothly. The choir describes itself as “leaderful,” encouraging all members to take on volunteer roles, whether ongoing or task-specific.

Each September, the chapter holds its Annual General Meeting to elect the LC, review the year, and vote on policy changes. Every few years, a Repertoire Review helps determine core songs, new pieces to explore, and songs ready for retirement.

Regional Collaboration

In June 2019, BPTC partnered with the Canmore Alpine Voices chapter to host a Western Canada Regional conference. With keynote speaker Kri Schlafer from the Portland Threshold Choir, the event brought together 35 singers from multiple chapters. It proved inspiring—especially for newly forming chapters—though the effort required was so substantial that the organizers have not yet attempted another.

Resilience During the Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, BPTC adapted swiftly. The choir moved to live Zoom meetings, which posed challenges for singing but strengthened relationships. Attendance remained strong, and the chapter emerged from the pandemic more unified than before.

When in-person rehearsals resumed, singers wore N95 masks and maintained two-meter distancing for nearly a year. Hybrid practices were attempted, but inconsistent sound quality made them difficult. Even so, the option allowed at-home singers to stay connected, which was deeply appreciated.

Choir Recognition

The choir recently received a meaningful note of gratitude from one of its facilities: "It means your group is spending a few hours roaming from room to room bringing joy, comfort, ease and sometimes even excitement to our patients who remain with us and anticipate your return. Our staff have embraced and in fact, taken an active involvement helping to sign up residents for your monthly visits. It has ended up becoming a special event for the patients and their visiting family and friends and something that the staff are so happy to support and witness."

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