

## **MONTEREY BAY THRESHOLD SINGERS**

### **Origins of the Chapter**

The Monterey Bay Threshold Singers trace their beginnings to 2011, when the originally named Threshold Choir of Pacific Grove officially became a chapter. The group emerged from a deep sense of calling felt by Susie Joyce, who encountered Threshold Choir founder Kate Munger at a singing retreat. Moved by the mission and the music, Susie spent four years learning about bedside singing before joining the Aromas Threshold Choir. For a full year, she drove an hour each way to weekly practices, learning the repertoire and preparing to create a new chapter in her own community. In April 2011, she held the first meeting of what would become the Pacific Grove Threshold Choir. Kate Munger, along with singers from the Aromas and Santa Cruz choirs, attended that inaugural gathering, offering support and encouragement. Susie has remained an active leader ever since.

### **Membership**

Over the years, the chapter has grown into a small but dedicated ensemble. The group currently includes seven members, four of whom regularly sing at bedsides. All members participate in song baths and public sings, contributing to the chapter's presence in the wider community. Two original members remain active, and the group includes a mother–daughter pair whose shared commitment adds a familial warmth to the choir's culture. Two members have written songs that the chapter actively sings, enriching the repertoire with locally rooted voices. One singer joined after moving from the Napa Valley Threshold Choir, bringing experience from another chapter.

### **Practices and Musical Life**

The choir practices weekly, maintaining a steady rhythm of learning, blending, and deepening their shared sound. Bedside sings average between four and six per month, while song baths occur roughly four times a year. Their clients come primarily through Hospice of the Central Coast as well as community referrals, reflecting the trust placed in the choir's gentle presence.

### **Leadership and Organizational Structure**

Leadership has evolved organically over time. For many years, Susie managed administration, outreach, scheduling, and the gathering of new songs and training from Threshold Choir events. In 2018, Jill stepped into leadership when Susie embarked on a cross-country journey to visit Threshold Choir chapters nationwide. During that period, Jill welcomed community singers into practices and helped sustain the group's momentum. By 2021, Susie resumed administrative responsibilities. Today, the chapter operates with three key roles: an administrator, a music director, and a hospice liaison responsible for scheduling bedside visits.

### **Membership Growth and Recruitment**

Recruiting singers in a musically rich town has always been a challenge. Early on, Susie reached out through singing communities, churches, poetry gatherings, classes, and even

Craigslist. Many professional singers attended practices, but the Threshold Choir’s emphasis on blending rather than soloistic singing did not appeal to everyone. For nine years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the chapter maintained a core of three active members—just enough for three-part harmonies—who practiced weekly and completed hospice training. The chapter has never had a waiting list; anyone who expresses interest is invited to attend a practice.

### **The Impact of COVID-19**

The pandemic reshaped the chapter’s activities in profound ways. Weekly practices moved to Zoom, often joined by singers from a local chorus. Bedside singing paused entirely, replaced by recorded songs sent to those in need of comfort. After lockdowns eased, five members remained active. Outdoor masked practices began in 2021, followed by masked outdoor song baths. Bedside singing resumed in 2022, though the chapter did not rejoin Hospice as official volunteers until 2024.

### **A Legacy in Writing**

One of the chapter’s founding members, Susie Joyce, chronicled her experiences in her book *The Songs We Sing*, which explores Threshold Choir singing and her travels to chapters across the country. Her writing captures the heart of the movement and preserves the story of the Monterey Bay Threshold Singers for future generations.

Threshold Choir Practice September 9, 2012. Susie Joyce, Jill Bernier, Suzan Kelly.



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