

THRESHOLD CHOIR OF ANN ARBOR

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT IS THRESHOLD CHOIR?

The Threshold Choir honors the ancient tradition of women singing at the bedsides of people who are struggling, some with living, some with dying. We send a small group of singers to offer soothing song to anyone who requests our singing (and their family and caregivers). Our repertoire is chosen to respond to individual needs and spiritual direction. Many of our songs are composed specifically for the choir.

The Threshold Choir of Ann Arbor is a chapter of the international Threshold Choir. Our website, www.thresholdchoirofannarbor.org, includes an introduction to the choir for the public (including potential recipients and their families), along with contact information for singing requests, membership and donations.

The international choir was founded in 2000 and includes over 125 chapters in this country and a growing number of chapters abroad. Its website, www.thresholdchoir.org, includes both a public section with a great deal of information about the choir – its mission, history and music – and a members-only section with a plethora of resources about choir events, workshops and new songs.

HOW DOES THRESHOLD CHOIR GET ASKED TO SING AT A BEDSIDE?

We take requests from anyone who would like to be sung to, whether they are in their own home or a care facility. When the request comes from a caregiver, family member, or facility staff member, our Singing Request Coordinator confirms that the song recipient is likely to be comfortable hearing us sing, whether or not the recipient can communicate directly.

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE FOR ARRANGING A BEDSIDE SING?

After the Singing Request Coordinator receives a request, a Song Mother is designated for the recipient. She is the one who will be the contact for the family, choose the repertoire, and lead the songs. She will finalize the bedside singing arrangements. Bedside singing groups usually consist of two to four singers. This or a similar group of women will also provide any ongoing singing for the recipient.

Our singers usually gather away from the recipient for about 20 minutes to warm up and confirm the song list. Then we are taken by a family member or facility member to the recipient's bedside, and we ask that the caregiver remain available to provide any assistance that the recipient might need. Singing softly and gently, like a mother singing lullabies to a precious child, we sing for 20 to 30 minutes with the Song Mother guiding the songs. We leave quietly, often while singing our final song.

The Ann Arbor Choir has an ongoing relationship with Arbor Hospice and with Huron Woods, a memory support assisted-living facility. We schedule regular bedside sings at both residences and are often called for bedside sings at other times by staff or family members of residents.

WHAT DOES IT COST TO HAVE SINGERS COME TO THE BEDSIDE?

Nothing. Our singers are honored to be able to offer our songs. We sometimes receive donations which are gratefully accepted.

DOES THE CHOIR SING AT OTHER PLACES AND TIMES IN ADDITION TO BEDSIDES?

We are occasionally invited by families to sing at funerals or memorial services. We may also be invited to Hospice memorial services or bereavement groups to share the gift of our singing. Sometimes we are asked to demonstrate bedside singing to caregiver or support groups who may wish to request singing for recipients in the future. When able, we meet these requests with ten to twenty minutes of song. We do not give performances or concerts.

WHAT IS THE GIFT OF SONG EVENT?

Twice a year we offer a "Gift of Song" – a gathering open to the public in which our choir shares our music in a quiet reflective setting. The second half of the gathering includes teaching some of our songs so everyone in attendance can sing along. Check our website or contact the Membership Coordinator for the date of the next "Gift of Song."

WHO CAN JOIN THE THRESHOLD CHOIR?

If you have longed to use your voice in service, can dance in the balance between confidence and humility about your voice, and are willing to look at mortality (your own and others'), this kind of singing may be for you. Many singers join the choir in gratitude for the gift that singing has been in their lives.

The first step in your decision may be the shiver down your spine when you first hear of our work. A trained voice is not necessary, but you must meet the following requirements:

1. You have a pleasant singing voice and can sing in tune.
2. You can hold your part in multiple-part singing.
3. You can blend your voice and sing softly with others.
4. You can communicate kindness with your singing and spoken voice.
5. You are willing to receive feedback about your voice and learn our bedside protocols.
6. You commit to memorizing the music and words of our songs through regularly attending the orientation and rehearsals, and by singing often throughout the week alone and/or with others in the choir.

WHAT IF I FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH MY SINGING?

In order to convey comfort, you and those singing with you need to feel comfortable with your singing.

If you have difficulty knowing if you are singing on the correct pitch, singing independently, feeling the beat and rhythm, staying on a particular part during a round, or blending with other voices, we suggest giving yourself the gift of private or group voice lessons with a vocal coach before joining the choir. A commitment to voice lessons may help you to gain skills and confidence.

Local vocal coaches include: Jesse Richards, (734) 995-2972; Kelly Close, (734)726-5053; Kathy Moore, (734) 668-8146; Jane Heirich, (734) 761-2135.

Also vocal coaching classes are available through Ann Arbor Rec & Ed, taught by Kelly Close (734) 994-2300 or <http://reced.aaps.k12.mi.us/reced.home/classes>

HOW DO I JOIN?

We do not have open rehearsals. However, if you have attended a Gift of Song and/or have reviewed our website and are interested in joining, give your name and email address to the Membership Coordinator. She will let you know when we will next be inviting a potential group of

new singers to explore joining the choir (usually in the fall). You will be provided with the detailed process at that time. Once you join the choir, you may be ready to become a bedside singer in the next year or two.

WHAT PERSONAL COMMITMENT IS REQUIRED?

Your personal commitment includes: attending rehearsals regularly, completing the required orientation program, learning and practicing the music through regular singing and listening, and learning about our bedside practice and expectations. Most singers are able to learn 50 songs in 1 to 3 years.

In addition, we ask that each choir member commit to looking at mortality – her own and others'. Some have faced death themselves or have been with friends or family during the dying process. Others read, talk, journal, sing, create art, or spend time in nature to ponder impermanence. Taking a course on death, completing the Five Wishes (or another living will) or hospice volunteer training are some of the ways our members have found to ponder mortality.

WHAT FINANCIAL COMMITMENT IS INVOLVED?

Each member purchases the repertoire book (\$18) and CDs (about \$25 for two) when she joins. In addition, she is expected to make donations that are both affordable and generous, to both the international and local choirs. Both the international and local choirs are 501(c)(3) organizations and can receive tax-deductible contributions.

The international membership donation (at least \$25, more if possible) is paid once a year, at the time of joining and renewal of membership. Donations can be made by check to Threshold Choir or by PayPal or credit card on the international website.

The local donations are given at rehearsals in cash or in a check made out to Threshold Choir of Ann Arbor, or by mail, automatic bank payment, or PayPal via the local website. We suggest a minimum donation of \$15-\$25 per month. However, no one is ever turned away from the choir for inability to make a financial contribution. Ongoing regular donations are appreciated and used to support the choir's needs, such as rehearsal space rental and paying our rehearsal leaders.

WHAT ARE REHEARSALS LIKE?

The full choir meets from 12:30 to 2:30 pm on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. We start promptly and appreciate promptness. We sit in a circle and begin with warm-ups, then take time to quiet and center. During the rehearsal we go around the circle twice, once to focus on each other, and once to name anyone we know who is on a threshold – living or dying – so that we can dedicate a song to them. Rehearsals may include new songs or old favorites, as we sing together or in smaller groups. We include exercises to develop bedside singing abilities. "The chair" sits in the center of the circle.

WHAT IS "THE CHAIR"?

We use a comfortable reclining folding portable chair during rehearsals so that we can:

1. Take turns feeling deeply what it feels like to be sung to and then give feedback
2. Learn to blend with other voices and sing as softly as possible and with intention
3. Remember what it feels like to take a rest and receive love and attention

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO LEARN THE MUSIC AFTER I'VE JOINED?

Basic ways of learning are listening and singing along with the CDs or recordings on the Threshold Choir website, attending choir rehearsals, and playing the music on a keyboard or instrument if you are able. You may record songs at rehearsal for your personal use. You can listen to the CDs almost everywhere (even if you can't sing along at the office). When listening, you are learning the songs at a very deep level! Singing daily – in the car, while cooking, cleaning, gardening, taking a shower – or meeting with a few choir friends to sing together are great ways to have the songs go deep into your singing memory. Take time to look in the songbook occasionally to see you are singing the correct words, pitches, and rhythms. If you don't read music, you can still check the words and rely more on the CD and the website recordings.

HOW MAY I SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE CHOIR?

We gratefully accept gifts from those called to support our work. Donations help pay for our rehearsal space, printing costs, national conference fees, and a modest stipend for our rehearsal leaders. Donate using the button at the bottom of the Contact page on our website. Threshold Choir of Ann Arbor is a 501(c)(3) organization. All contributions are tax-deductible.

Threshold Choir of Ann Arbor

734-531-7960 (Note: If no one answers, the phone will ring for about 25 seconds. Please be patient and wait for the greeting to leave a message.)

thresholdofaa@gmail.com

website: thresholdchoirofannarbor.org

Singing Request:

If you are calling or emailing with a singing request, leave a message for Carol, our Singing Request Coordinator

Membership Inquiry:

If you are calling or emailing to ask about membership, leave a message for Pat, our Membership Coordinator

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