

Children's Choir Leaves For Japan Concert Tour

By Joan Rice
Journal Staff Writer

Members of the St. Louis Children's Concert Choir will be learning a lot more than four-part harmony this week. They're going international.

Today (Wednesday) they embarked on a concert tour of Japan. Its purpose is as much to share experiences as to perform in Tokyo, Kyoto and Suwa.

The concert choir is one of three groups comprising the St. Louis Children's Choirs, an organization formed to help children build music appreciation and "character," said Ballwin resident Ethelyn Sparfeld. She is the choirs' music director.

THE OTHER two groups are the Children's Choir for beginners and the Chamber Choir for intermediate singers. The Concert Choir is a more accomplished choral group.

Music has "soothing, peaceful and uplifting" qualities which smooth over the rough spots youngsters encounter as they grow, Sparfeld said. "With all of the ugliness thrown before the world, it's (music is) needed all the more," she added.

The touring experience should achieve the same goal, she said. Aside from sightseeing, the 34-member group plans to stay with Japanese families in Kyoto and Suwa.

The choir will join voices with five Japanese children's choirs in Suwa, said Sparfeld. While the American children may find Japanese respect for authority is supreme, Japanese youngsters may discover American children are happy working without competitive pressures, Sparfeld predicted.

ACTUALLY, THE choir's 34 members and 10 adult chaperones have already been introduced to aspects of Japanese culture. Two weeks of orientation sessions coincided with the Missouri Botanical Garden's Japanese Festival.

Above all, group members and their families now realize the size of a traveler's purse. They sold pizzas and pies, had garage

Continued on Page 16

Children's Choir

Continued from Page 1

sales, gave concerts, solicited corporate and individual contributions, conducted raffles and washed cars in addition to paying \$300 apiece.

Of the anticipated \$70,000 needed, about \$55,000 was raised. Choir president Dave Meeker and Sparfeld asked the families for \$400 more per child, she said. "It was a real hardship for parents. Some had to take out loans."

But if it costs, it also pays. The children will return Aug. 4 with a richer sense of their own culture, she said.