

Barrett Sisters deliver a 'service ministry'

By Jim Adams
Staff Writer

*When we get to heaven,
We're gonna walk, the streets of
glory.
We're gonna shout, the trouble's
over.
We're gonna talk, and tell the
blessed story.
We're gonna sing and shout the
victory.*

The Barrett Sisters have sung those lyrics in London, Paris and New York's Carnegie Hall.

Thursday night they sang and shouted their gospel harmonies before hundreds of people in the overflowing parking lot of Park Avenue Methodist Church, 3400 Park Av. S.

The church's 12th annual Soul Liberation Festival this week was a natural setting for the Barrett Sisters. They began singing together as youngsters in the choir of Morning Star Baptist Church on Chicago's South Side. They have become a gospel-music institution, as has Soul Liberation at the 91-year-old church.

The sisters — DeLois, Billie and Rodessa — live in a South Side suburb of Chicago. Each is married and has grown children. The trio has won international acclaim in gospel-music circles for more than 20 years.

They were the highlight of the gospel movie, "Say Amen, Somebody," which explored the roots and pioneers of gospel music. They have toured Europe



The Barrett Sisters, from left, DeLois Campbell, Billie Greenbey and Rodessa Porter, performed Thursday.

frequently and been on television programs ranging from the "Tonight Show" to the "Praise The Lord Club."

The Barretts also have an enthusiastic following in the Twin Cities.

They have appeared here many times, most recently in St. Paul in May. They often sing on American Public Radio's "Prairie Home Companion" show, where they'll

perform Saturday night.

Their sound grows out of their commitment to provide a "service ministry," rather than just entertainment. They often sing at churches and revivals, but never nightclubs, said Rodessa Porter.

"We're not preachers, we're just singers," Porter said after rehearsing Thursday afternoon.

"We want to let the world know

that God still lives and that He has a meaning for their life if they let Him in. . . . We believe what we sing. It's not just an act, it's a daily way of living. Our singing is part of us."

The sisters definitely had the crowd's attention last night as people clapped in rhythm to the melodies. The singers returned for several encores.

The Barretts' message of hope this week is the reason behind Soul Liberation, which ends Sunday. The festival began "with our working in the community. We know so many people and many would not come into the church," said the Rev. Art Erickson, youth pastor.

"So we felt we had to go to the other side of the wall. We wanted to take a message out, a message of hope."

The Rev. Phillip Hinerman, senior pastor, said he has seen pain and broken lives in the community since coming to the 1,100-member church in 1952. At that time blacks were refused membership and Hinerman led the way to eliminate race restrictions for members.

"How do we heal the brokenness? How do we put our lives, our neighborhoods, our world back together?" Hinerman said.

"We seek to make a difference in our world one person at a time, beginning by telling the good news that we are very special in God's sight and that we can choose to be his daughter or son."