

Applying the Latest Covid/Music Research to Church Life

Limitations and Opportunities

The Big Takeaways

- The three big takeaways from the research up to the moment are:
 1. Masks are absolutely required. Without masking singing can create aerosolized environments within an approx. 13 ft. box around them over the course of an hour. Even with masks there is still a 3 ft. zone around a vocalist in which infection is possible.
 2. Spacing is crucial. 6 ft. minimum is necessary.
 3. Time is a huge factor. After 30 minutes a break is necessary, followed by a minimum of one (three recommended) air change(s).

Thinking Safely and Strategically about Recommendations

- It is important to remember that we still have a tiny sample size of research.
- Research was conducted in a well-ventilated rehearsal space of approx. 15'x15'. There is no research about how that scales up to a larger space.
- Research was conducted with only individual singers, so far there is no understanding of how that scales up into communal singing.
- It is very difficult to correctly calculate the air-change rate of your given space.
- Do not push your plans up to the limits recommended by these studies: choose a safer number well within the recommended limits.

Outdoor Congregational Singing

- Masking still required. It does so much to reduce aerosol transmission.
- Wind direction and strength is still a factor even with masks. Set up seating patterns that do not put family units directly downwind of one another.
- Tenting can only be canopies.
- Group Singing should still be very limited. Consider a hymn at the beginning middle and the end of the service. Music should be well under the 30-minute limit given that there will likely not be 5-minute break to refresh the area, and that the service will last around an hour.
- Aim for no more than about 15 minutes of masked congregational singing.

Indoor Congregational Singing

- All groups must be seated with a 6ft radius between them.
- With 30 minutes of singing, a masked person generates a high infection risk within an approx. 3ft bubble around them. Remember that is using a 64% effective mask. You will have no control over the masks worn by your congregation. Incorrect mask-wearing also makes congregational singing more risky.
- We do not yet have research about the effect of variable room size or communal singing on the build-up of aerosols and potential infection risk. *Be well-within the lower-risk zone.*
- In an hour-long service keep any group singing **absolutely** under five minutes per 30 minute period. **Even this is not recommended with the current status of research.**
- University of Bristol study: soft talking/singing are equal in risk. *Invite your congregation to sing under the breath or even softly hum along with a soloist leading the hymns.*
- Traditional robust congregational singing cannot be safely practiced at this time and with the current level of research.
- Preferably your congregation can find alternative ways to engage with music in the church other than active singing.

Indoor Hygiene

- Any shared surfaces must be minimized.
- Empty the pews of Bibles, hymnals, and prayer-books.
- Provide paper bulletins with full scriptural text, prayers, and music for the service. Anything that a congregant would need a book for should be replaced with the weekly bulletin during this pandemic.

Choral Singing

- At this time it is **impossible** to recommend a large choir rehearse and sing with normal vocal production.
- Knowing that up a ~3ft. box around a singer has a high risk of infection after 60 minutes of singing, space accordingly and decide on numbers based on that spacing.
- Plan as though you will have 60 minutes of continuous singing because there are so many variables:
 1. Effect of congregation on aerosol production.
 2. Highly variable rate of air change depending on facility.
 3. Between the amount of time for rehearsal before mass and multiple services back-to-back at some churches, it would easily be possible to exceed 60 minutes of total singing before a complete air change has occurred.

Choral Singing (cont.)

- The 6ft. guideline is valuable because it exceeds the risky area for masked singing.
- The high infection risk area for unmasked singing is $\sim >6\text{ft.}$ within just 30 minutes. For this reason *unmasked singing cannot be recommended.*
- Measure out your space and determine how many singers can be accommodated with a 6ft. radius between themselves as well as the nearest congregants.
- There has been no research regarding how aerosols fall out of lofts, so be cautious.
- If a small group is present for singing, consider having them only sing on the anthems, while a soloist leads on the hymns. This will minimize aerosol build-up.

Masks

- The following is based on the CSU Aerosol Study:
 - Homemade/cloth masks are not particularly effective at blocking particles the size of Covid-19.
 - They can be made more effective by adding a layer of furnace air paper.
 - The most effective masks are surgical masks that are fitted correctly. (They should leave a mark).
 - No singer masks have performed well in testing and are less effective than cloth masks.
- If you have the space to accommodate a few singers, provide them with the correct masks to ensure safety for all.

Amount of Music

- Aim for no more than *about 10 minutes of sung music* in a 30 minute period.
- Dispersed throughout the service.
- This will give you time to run the music before the service.
- This accounts for the possibility of multiple masses.
- While some amount of air change will occur in the room over the course of a Sunday morning, it is difficult to say how many will occur, and so it is safe to plan for a number underneath the *30 minutes continuous limit*.

Timeline

- Unfortunately, the research seems to agree that the success of the containment option on its own is unlikely.
- We will likely need to wait for a vaccine and/or highly effective treatments to be available before the pandemic begins to subside.
- Reset expectations: plan that at least the remainder of 2020 will continue with this new normal, and possibly a good part of the first half of 2021. *Plan ahead and create positive goals for this time.*

Opportunities for your Choir

- Virtual Programming:
 - Virtual choirs have been well-explored.
 - Consider more live recordings of a soloist or instrumentalists.
 - Dig through archived recordings of your music program.
- Keep the social element alive.
 - Ensure that choir participation will not be permanently affected.
 - Happy hours for social engagement.
 - Consider educational opportunities. What about inviting speakers to talk to your choirs over Zoom about musical/religious topics?
 - Indulge in things you normally don't have time for: have you always wanted to teach your choir how to read chant notation? What about inviting choir members to learn notes for new anthems that you can enjoy when you get back?
 - Find ways to incentivize the eventual return to normal choral singing. Everyone wants something to look forward to right now.

Opportunities for your Congregation

- Spiritual:
 - If a soloist is singing hymns without congregational singing, invite the congregation to meditate on the poetry and ideas of the hymns. Make this a time of rediscovery for the beautiful texts of the *Hymnal 1982*.
 - Program new hymns in addition to the familiar that a congregation can slowly learn as they listen to the mass.
- Educational:
 - Take this time to teach your congregation about musical and liturgical traditions which they may be familiar with, but of which they may not know the significance or origin.
 - Topics could include: the parts of the mass, the role of the anthem, the origins of hymns.
 - Encourage your congregation to re-engage with the organ as a part of worship: find time to teach them about the instruments themselves and about the repertoire, and particularly liturgical connections between the voluntaries and the rest of the service.

Active meditation and education about the music of the church will make people cherish it all the more and participate more eagerly when it is safe to sing once more!