

Guidelines for Singing in Worship

For centuries, singing and lifting our voices in praise to God have been at the heart of Christian worship. For many, congregational singing is among the most moving and meaningful parts of worship.

The weight of current scientific opinion, however, says that singers are at high risk of transmission of COVID-19. In March 2020, there was a “superspreader” event at a church choir practice in Skagit, Washington. Among the 61 singers at the rehearsal, 1 was symptomatic. After the 2 ½ hour rehearsal, 87% of the choir members developed COVID-19. Three were hospitalized and 2 died.

The research of epidemiologists – scientists who specialize in the study of the spread of diseases like viruses – suggests:

- singing has the potential to produce aerosols – tiny droplets of moisture capable of carrying COVID-19
- droplets carrying the virus may be produced by asymptomatic carriers of the virus
- droplets can linger in the air for extended periods of time
- the number of droplets emitted by singing increases with volume
- singing can fill a room with clouds of tiny droplets
- recirculated air can increase disease transmission rates
- there is no existing barrier method (masks, etc.) that prevents the production and spread of aerosols

In conclusion, choral singing and congregational singing are unsafe during a respiratory pandemic like the one we find ourselves in.

The National Association of Teachers of Singing, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorus America, Barbershop Harmony Society, and Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA) presented a webinar on this topic in early May. The understanding of these experts of the risks of contracting COVID-19 by singing in groups mirrored that of the science shared above.

In a church context, it is important to note that the persons at risk include choir members, musicians, pastors, staff and congregational members.

Recommendations

To ensure the health and well-being of choir members, musicians, pastors, staff, and congregation members and to do no harm through our worship services in the midst of this ongoing pandemic, the conference recommends a conservative approach with regard to singing in worship:

- Choirs, small vocal ensembles, and soloists rehearse virtually
- For in-person worship services, music by choirs, small vocal ensembles and soloists be prerecorded and shared using screens
- For in-person worship services, there be no congregational singing

That said, we recognize that there are a wide variety of contexts in the North Texas Conference. We also recognize that the risk of transmission during choral and congregational singing depends on factors such as the size of the room; the length of time singers are together; the number of singers; and how far apart singers are from one another and from the congregation. Wearing masks while singing also is a factor to consider. While masks will not eliminate the possibility of transmission of COVID-19 while singing, they can help to reduce the risk. When considering including live singing in worship services, Trustees and local church leaders must assess and weigh the risks in their contexts.

Sources:

<https://focus.masseyeandear.org/is-singing-in-a-choir-safe-during-covid-19-a-voice-expert-explains-the-risk/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6919e6.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFI3GsVzj6Q>

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/05/27/dr-anthony-fauci-catholic-churches-masks-communion-covid-coronavirus>