



Memo: In-person Worship Guidelines for Singing

Date: May 14, 2020

From: The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle

To: The Rectors, Priests in Charge, and Heads of Congregations

I presented a document and process for reimagining a return to worship. In the extensive, phase-process guidelines, I outline many things for leaders in our churches and church offices to think about and to prepare before we begin worship in person again. You can read that full [document here](#).

In addition to this document I offer you these guidelines for singing and music during in-person worship.

We are learning new things about COVID-19 daily, and the more we learn the better we can understand how to mitigate its spread. The spread of COVID-19 is primarily through respiratory droplets expelled through respiratory activity such as speaking, singing, coughing, sneezing, and even breathing. We combat this by physical distancing, facial covering, hand washing, not touching our own faces, and frequently cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces. We do these things to reduce the spread of respiratory droplets which could contain the virus.

When it comes to singing in Phase II of our slow and safe return to in-person worship I put forth these simple guidelines:

- No singing by the congregation – hymnals should be removed
- Any choir or vocal performers must be separated by 15 feet from others
- Any choir or vocal performers must not be elevated in a loft above other people in the church. Choristers that are on platforms or seated antiphonally in a choir stall need to be further than 15 feet from the first pew.

I expect these basic rules to be followed to take the safest possible route.

Respiratory droplets, caused by sneezing and coughing, are the real threat, and these very droplets are promoted by singing. It is understood by at least one study that singing will not project these droplets a distance further than 6ft, and it's even fewer feet for wind instruments¹.

Studies have shown that respiratory aerosols, which are microscopic in size compared to respiratory droplets, are caused by singing and do travel further than droplets. However, there is

¹ <https://slippedisc.com/2020/05/two-munich-scientists-pronounce-singing-to-be-covid-safe/>

no evidence that shows aerosols are capable of spreading COVID-19. To be as safe as possible with our limited knowledge, I am asking you to show extra caution by increasing the physical distance between singers and others present.

The CDC, in their Interim Guidance for Communities of faith says, “Avoid or consider suspending use of a choir or musical ensemble during religious services or other programming, if appropriate within the faith tradition. Consider having a soloist or strictly limiting the number of choir members and keep at least six feet between individuals”²

Simply put, the first priority is safety and caution and as we creatively encounter our in-person worship with new restrictions. I ask rectors, who have complete liturgical and musical oversight, to work closely with their music directors, choirs and vocal performers to bring about the best pastoral solution.

² https://context-cdn.washingtonpost.com/notes/prod/default/documents/5c0a7b41-2997-4a9a-ad3a-7d2ff788fc8e/note/8c6cbafb-bc04-4d78-9f15-cf27fc7c4b4d.?fbclid=IwAR06-ZrRXKCSZ8mg50_kzO3So_1sjPE64ypr_sz3WIKNkRhA-7wQgNyfnfY#page=1