

Considerations for Music Ministry in the Church

As churches begin to plan for when and how they will re-open their facilities, we have put together considerations specifically for worship leaders and clergy planning how worship, including, music ministry will resume.

Unfortunately, in-person worship presents a high-risk for transmitting COVID-19. Many of our common practices in worship have the potential to cause airborne spread. In addition, because of the age and demographics, many of our congregants are at greater risk for serious complications from COVID-19. Therefore, we should carefully consider when and how to resume in-person worship and have a clear plan.

We view these guidelines as a “living document” that will change as more information becomes available or conditions change. These guidelines are applicable to all musical ensembles, not just those we’ve expressly mentioned.

Preparing the Space for Music Ministry

1. Deep clean the entire rehearsal and worship space after each rehearsal and each worship service. Consider shampooing carpets, sanitizing pews, sanitizing robing rooms, wiping doorknobs and light switches, disable communal water fountains, and cleaning sound equipment.
2. Use chemicals and disinfectants as directed and allow for proper dry times.
3. Temporarily remove multi-use items in the pews (attendance pads, hymnals, bibles, pens, prayer cards)
4. Post signs in rehearsal areas about not shaking hands and instead using non-contact greetings. You can promote the hashtags
#itsoktosmileandwave
#spreadthegospelnotgerms
5. Place hand sanitizer stations near the entrance and exit of your rehearsal hall and worship space.
6. Supply masks for worship leaders, other musicians, and production crew.
7. Ask your building manager about the AC units in your rehearsal or worship spaces. Key Questions include:
 - *What is the Air Change Rate? The higher the better for this has been shown to mitigate the spread of many airborne viruses.*
 - *Does your AC have UV protection? This has been shown to mitigate the spread of many airborne viruses.¹*
 - *When is the last time the filters have been changed? We would recommend changing before returning to practice in your rehearsal space.*
 - *Is the air being recycled from indoors or is it coming from outside? At this juncture outside air is preferred.*

¹ <https://rdcu.be/b4klq>

Music in Worship

Based on the research we have before us, the committee is recommending a single soloist model for vocal music. When the soloist is accompanied by an ensemble, we recommend limiting ensemble size. As guidelines and research continue to evolve, we suggest following the recommendations set forth by the CDC and local health officials until a vaccine is available and appropriate mass inoculation has occurred.

1. All worship participants and leaders are urged to wear masks. Masks may be removed during their particular act of worship.
 - a. When a worship leader or pastor is speaking or singing, they do not have to wear a mask, but should maintain a distance of 20 feet from the congregation.^{2 3}
2. No singing/humming by the congregation. The committee encourages alternative ways to explore hymnody and song. Some ideas are: to read the text quietly as a congregation, use virtual presentations of the songs, or use a soloist to lead the song and the congregation read the text silently.
3. Musicians should be spaced the appropriate distance from the congregation. Non-wind aided instruments (6 feet), wind aided instrument(s) (20 feet), and singer(s) (20 feet) Musicians should be spaced the appropriate distance from each other and other worship leaders: non-winded instruments (6 feet) and singers and wind aided instruments (10 feet).
 - a. Consider roping off a “no fly zone” in front of singers and speakers. Science has indicated that aerosols can hang in the air.
 - i. Vocal performer(s) or wind-aided instruments must not be elevated in a balcony above other people in the church unless 1.5x the amount of linear space can be achieved.
 - ii. Vocal performer(s) and wind-aided instruments that are on platforms or seated antiphonally in a choir stall must be further than 20 feet from each other.
 - b. Consider acrylic shields in front of singers to minimize vocal spray.
4. No microphone passing or sharing. If that is not possible, we encourage worship leaders to sanitize after each use.
 - a. Considering assigning microphones to the same speaker each week.
 - b. Provide sanitizing wipes to be used after microphone use to protect sound engineers moving equipment.
5. Come up with a cleaning and sanitizing checklist for musical equipment.

² https://www.nats.org/Library/COVID_19_Resource_Docs/Milton_COVID-19_Singing.pdf

³ <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/14/science/coronavirus-transmission-cough-6-feet-ar-ul.html&sa=D&ust=1590325247479000&usq=AFQjCNEaNV9VygI8yJ34tQ0gAn2Gt3oDHA>

Commonly asked Questions

1. What if the Congregation sings softly or hums in their mask?

Unfortunately, that is not a recommendation we can give at this moment in time. There is emerging science that indicates that Covid19 can be aerosolized and the particles can penetrate the mask and hang in the air for 8 to 10 minutes. Also, softly is a relative term that means different things to a professional vs a member of the congregation.

2. What about that study that says.....?

This is a new virus and new discoveries are occurring weekly. At this point there is not enough science to completely validate any one argument. We urge worship leaders to err on the side of caution.

3. When will choirs and congregations be able to sing again?

As of right now we don't know the answer to that question, but as of May 2020 the CDC and many scientists consider it dangerous behavior.⁴

4. Why do singers need to stand further apart than other musicians?

Covid-19 is generally passed on through droplet transmission. Scientists are currently looking at a number of situations that could be considered dangerous behavior. Unfortunately singing is one of them. No matter the volume, singers emit more vocal spray than talking or breathing. Right now the hypothesis of certain scientists is that singing can be as dangerous as coughing or sneezing.⁵

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⁴ <https://emoryvoicecenter.blogspot.com/2020/05/is-it-safe-for-choirs-to-rehearse-or.html?fbclid=IwAR0tH42lk1Mp-lbSuddcxcHvu4H3-XFfpC-mmIGRD8WI3bxOQ3QB-E-NiE4>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/14/science/coronavirus-transmission-cough-6-feet-ar-ul.html>