

Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina

Updated Singing Guidelines

November 2020

As this pandemic has progressed, we have always said that as new information became available, we would adjust our guidelines accordingly. For many of our clergy, staff, and parishioners, one of the biggest losses in this time has been the restrictions on singing that we have had to impose. As many of you are now no doubt aware, we are increasingly understanding that this virus spreads rapidly through aerosol droplets. Singing produces a higher level of aerosols than many other vocal activities.

The science of the aerosolization of COVID-19 is still in its infancy so our knowledge remains incomplete. But recent studies have confirmed that singing with a high quality, well-fitting mask significantly reduces the number of aerosol-borne particles produced by a singer with no ill effects to the singers themselves. That knowledge, combined with other countermeasures such as adequate distancing between singers and efficient room air exchange and filtration, make us comfortable offering the following guidelines for possible singing arrangements indoors either during a live liturgy, livestreamed service or for recording purposes.

To be clear: singing of any kind increases the risk of transmission from infected persons, and no gathering of individuals can be risk-free. However, it is possible to reduce the potential risk by implementing layers of evidence-based countermeasures. All singers must keep the same rules that apply across church activities at this time—masked the entire time, screened for symptoms, proper hand hygiene, keeping their distance from others. And as with all our Diocesan recommendations, taking this step is entirely optional. The health and safety of you and your parish should always be of primary concern.

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING REMAINS SUSPENDED AT THIS TIME, but you may have up to a quartet (4) of singers indoors IF you can and choose to meet the following criteria:

Masks: Masks must be worn at all times and must be properly fit. ASTM Level 3 masks are recommended. Masks must fully cover the face from the bridge of the nose to beneath the chin and fit snugly on the face (ideally leaving an impression on the skin to minimize the release of aerosols). A tied mask may fit more snugly than securing with an ear loop. [Here](#) is an example.

Distancing: Singers must be 15ft or more apart to allow any escaping aerosols to be diluted by surrounding air flow. Everyone must face in the same direction, no curves or semi-circles. Conductors should maximize the space between themselves and singers facing their direction. When singing, singers must keep 15ft away from any other congregant or service participant. Congregants and service participants must make a point not to walk through the area into which the singers are projecting. Explaining how the spacing will be set up and maintained for all present will be an essential part of any plan for indoor singing (submitting pictures or diagrams can be helpful).

Ventilation: Expansion of indoor singing is also dependent upon sufficient ventilation, air flow and filtration. Church worship spaces vary significantly in size and HVAC engineering, and should be professionally evaluated to ensure minimum criteria can be met. Open doors and windows can be helpful. If doors and windows are closed, HVAC systems must be running in the “fan on” mode and be

circulating air such that room air exchanges at least three times per hour. Filtration at MERV13 or higher is mandatory for filtering virus particles. Some worship spaces may require more outside air circulation than others and may benefit from portable air changers with HEPA filtration and fans. There are online tools to help you determine air exchange and filtration in your context but a professional should be consulted to help determine these metrics.

Time: Please keep time of active singing to less than 30 minutes. After 30 minutes a break must be taken to allow for at least one complete exchange of the air in the room (see above to calculate).

Outdoor Singing: A quartet of singers 15ft or more apart may sing without masks outdoors. Singers should always remain masked except when singing. Canopies may be used if necessary but not if they have sides that restrict air flow.

Youth and Children: Youth 13 and older may participate in choral singing according to the above guidelines. For children 12 and younger, intergenerational choirs may be considered, but each child must have a parent or guardian taking part with them and plans must include protocols to ensure all above guidelines are being met.

Each parish must submit a written plan to their Regional canon or Missioner explaining how they will meet all these standards before they can commence indoor singing with multiple singers. The plan must be signed by the parish Organist/Choirmaster/Musician, Rector/Lead Priest, and the Junior and Senior Warden.