

Notes from the RSCM Webinar 22 May 2020
What next for the Ministry of Music in our Parishes and Dioceses?’



We did, as promised, pass on all the questions raised by attendees to the Church authorities

The questions raised are available to view, with answers from the panel, separately.

We will, also as promised, be sharing some practical help-sheets in the near future. This will include practical suggestions of the sorts of music which might be used in various worship scenarios, recognising that as churches re-open, it will not be to the 'normal', long-established patterns of worship and music.

Some of our next webinars will pick up the many questions around technical help and training.

Some of the websites mentioned by Dr Charlie Bell:

Every Mind Matters (<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>)

Here is the German study — unfortunately, it's in German:

(<https://www.mh-freiburg.de/hochschule/covid-19-corona/risikoeinschaetzung>)

The BioRISC centre from St Catharine's (<https://www.caths.cam.ac.uk/research/biorisc>)

The following is an outline transcript; please consult the video for the full text.

Abbreviations:

+C: Bishop Christopher Foster

+G: Archbishop George Stack

MS: Matthew Salisbury

NT: Noël Tredinnick

TD: Tom Daggett

DP: David Price

SM: Sal McDougall

CB: Charlie Bell

General positioning

+C: This is a PROCESS of recovery — of buildings/worship Creative thinking is going to be needed as to how churches can best serve congregations. 'Congregations' will encompass gathered and virtual groups.

+G: It is regretful that churches are in the last phase of re-opening. But a reopening for private prayer (and more for public worship) will require much in the way of provision preparation.

4th July is a date churches are working to for some form of prayer opening. Wales is not working to the same timeline

Cardinal Nichols is involved in a government think-tank.

+C: Time between now and 4th July should be spent not only addressing the practical ones, but also the big, important ones.

+G: Catholic and Anglican churches have had a different set of approaches for clergy being able to be able to broadcast services. Catholic churches have been strongly pursuing a live-streaming offering, which has been a very important and successful development.

+C: Flexibility and imagination is going to be needed.

MS: Surveys do indicate interesting results, including that this is a way of connecting with those who attend church less often, or not at all.

It's crucial to adhere to government guidelines; applying them to each individual church is complex across a diverse church 'landscape'.

The return of choirs to lead worship has no date attached to it.

NT: churches are becoming excited about 'through the screen'.

Larger buildings allow for 'anonymous' congregation participation — that is mirrored online where 'enquiring' is possible

DP: We have time to foresee and plan — which is harder than the sad but inevitable closure that led to lockdown.

We need models of good practice: Lots of conversations at a high level are happening which will help that (including choirs)

Practical thinking

NT: screens and physical integration. To lose the thrust gained recently would be a pity: it is likely that cameras will now be a presence in our churches

TD: practical suggestions will look different for different people/situations.

It's important to keep the 'pack' together (wrt school [children])

Worship needs to be live; skilled people should be paid to do what they are trained to do

Hymn singing is important

Engaging people from the congregation to lead the singing might be a helpful thing to.

Smaller numbers of people at services might in fact need more services

A broadening of musical offering might follow

DP: Social media is very anecdotal: Don't be too depressed (or optimistic!). Guidance coming from the Church of England are hopefully going to be practically-focused.

Small singing ensembles might be an earlier possibility than a full choir.

Conversations between e.g. churches and schools from which e.g. choristers come are important.

Music streaming from within churches might be possible before a resumption of full public worship is resumed.

Electronic connection with choirs is important

MS: Guidance for the CofE is being prepared for a variety of scenarios.

Do think about the possibilities in your own church context with the forces you have

Instrumentalists? Soloists? Think ahead so that we are all ready when further guidance comes.

DP: Keeping in touch with your choirs (/children in choirs) is really important — even to meet via Zoom — to keep interest and potentially take parts of rehearsals.

Some form of music making is really positive.

NT: keeping strict time is really important in Zoom rehearsals/recording.

SM: We are capable of more than we might have thought. Hybrid modelling is important; and the need for adapting established practice. Conversation is really important — e.g. between clergy and musicians.

What does a realistic local solution look like where you are?

Medical/scientific issues

CB: There has been an enormous amount of 'noise' around this. There has been much media coverage about science — but the scientific community is not in a place to be able to definitively say whether aerosol transmission is significant, and therefore whether there is a significant risk from singing.

That makes creating a risk assessment difficult.

Models being created should be reviewed by scientific groups, not least to build confidence (for governments, and those needing to implement guidelines)

Influenza and Coronavirus are different diseases.

There are stories where whole choirs have contracted COVID-19 as a result of one person being infected, but we don't actually have evidence that the singing itself was the source of the spreading of the disease.

There are two forms of virus transmission: droplets (small particles) and aerosols (really small particles).

Droplets sit on surfaces. Aerosols are the source of the fear. They hang around in the air for longer. Singers might be producing more such aerosol droplets: but there is no definitive report which says that aerosol is a mode of coronavirus transmission.

A lot of what we are doing is assessing risk.

Droplets are not so hard to avoid with distance, and cleaning.

Risk assessment formations: need to be reasonable — pragmatic and rational is really important (leading to different advice in different scenarios) Flexibility is important — the science will be changing over time.

Bio risk centre St catherine's college, Cambridge

Episcopal church of Scotlad has a scientific advisory group.

Department for Education: if children are being encouraged to sing in schools for well-being, what about in church? Accuracy of language is important

Congregational singing: international view is that this is probably fine. Science and risk assessments are changing.

Organs: NO evidence that they spread disease (but effective cleaning is important)

Outdoor services: 2m advice from government is based on outside — so actually, outdoor services may be at least part of a positive answer.

Flexibility is key.

Government website on public website?

Organists issues:

+C: these things are under active consideration. The government regulations are important — leading to being as permissive as we can, whilst keeping people safe.

There are practical implications to work through — but there are active conversations happening (bell ringers, flower arrangers, altar servers etc are also all part of the church community, and affected)

MS: There is an awareness that organists need practice opportunities (and to be able to continue to encourage young people)

CB: Mental health of choristers: Every Mind Matters booklet is really helpful, including signposts to e.g. therapies

Consequences of the current situation

SM: It's important to acknowledge it's a traumatic time for church musicians. It's disruptive and dislocating. Many church musicians have had 'part of their identity removed' as a result of this: so the church has a pastoral responsibility. They need encouragement.

Practical things: stay in touch — an email, a phone call, honest conversation.

We know that a return to how things were in the short term won't be possible.

Reassuring musicians that they are still needed is important.

The RSCM is trying to ensure that music is represented in the big conversations which are happening.

Those who are preparing online worship still need the input and help from church musicians.

There is a future beyond all this: and music is a really important part of this.

Financial matters:

+C: I certainly hope that we can employ organists and musicians. I cannot look into a crystal ball. Church finances vary enormously.

There are significant financial challenges — but nurturing of worship is of course fundamental. The coming together of a Christian community is fundamental: Zoom etc. can do so much, but the Christian church is called to reach out, and our buildings are an important part of that

+G Isolation is a problem

The communion of the church is an example and a witness.

The days of depending on Sunday collections have gone: this current situation has pointed this up. Standing order offerings are important; and credit card donations (card contactless touch points etc).

TD: Many of our workforce have no, or flimsy contracts; there are also many furloughed musicians and staff: there is going to need a huge need to build bridges.

A practical suggestion of choristers being in touch is a phone tree (arranged on a rota basis) — this might perhaps include furloughed information.

The church needs to think about how to enable furloughed musicians to be in contact with their choirs.

If churches can only have a small congregation at one time, it might need more services at different times to be able to minister to all the church community — that might open the doors to a wider range of musicians.

DP: We have learnt that music has helped people get through this lockdown: we owe a huge debt to all those who have made recordings (professional and amateur) over years.

HOW we do things are important.

The Ouseley Trust and Friends of Cathedral Music have opened a support fund, recognising the more you can model what your church is going to look like, the easier the move back to church is going to be — do talk to others about it (including the panel from today's website)

NT: In this lockdown, we haven't known how long it will go on and people have approached the electronic with enthusiasm. It might be that the technological skills that people have been devising are now really helpful.

The recent recording experiences for supporting online workshops are helpful and are likely to be part of the landscape moving forwards.

HM: Doing SOME singing with your choirs is really important: keeping singers engaged is really crucial

CB: There is a desire not to lose what's wonderful about choral and other traditions of music: that forms part of the liturgy and worship of the church: the church has picked up on this.

Thinking outside the box is good — but we mustn't lose sight of the desire to return to what choirs do best.

Questions about masks: cultural and some scientific reasons in the UK mean that masks are not necessarily being advocated.

We have a responsibility as singers and musicians to speak scientifically about science, and not to claim that things that are not science are science.

Advice from bishops is really important.

MS: It's really important not to hypothesise on the basis of the things we don't have answers for.

Organs and maintenance: there is a very detailed set of guidance available on the Church of England website. At the time of this webinar, practice of the organ is not viewed as an essential activity.