

Models for playing and singing music in churches and cathedrals as lockdown restrictions ease

At the beginning of Lockdown in March 2020, a small task force was created to help advise the Church of England on pathways back to music in church. This group was asked to put together some suggestions and worked examples for group singing in the context of Coronavirus. These examples are based on the broad principles outlined in the recent guidance document brought to the House of Bishops Recovery sub-group on church music. They are not exhaustive but rather model some potential options that could be employed in a variety of different contexts, from worship band to robed choir, from small to large building. It is recommended that these examples or variations of them be offered alongside the guidance documents to showcase some of what may be safely possible in different contexts. Singing in small, directed groups may pose a different set of challenges to congregational singing, and these models are intentionally designed to make use of the support available in different church settings.

Many churches have opened for public worship. Many have yet so to do. These models provide a springboard for effective utilisation of risk assessment and a roadmap for levels of music contribution to divine worship..

Several broad principles are key:

- An appreciation of age-stratification and appropriate management of underlying disease risk in singers and congregations;
- An awareness of logistics beyond the singing itself;
- An appreciation of the opportunities and restraints that exist as a result of different buildings and the space within them;
- Strict adherence to (and concordance with) other Church of England and wider governmental guidance;
- A commitment to personal responsibility for choir members and effective and appropriate safeguarding and management of risk for children;
- Engagement in public health practices (such as Track and Trace);
- Commitment to appropriate risk assessment for individual circumstances;
- Encouragement of informed discussion with choir members themselves.

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Model A: Parish Church with music group and amplified singers

These “phases” are intended as a guide in each model. It may, for example, be possible for a larger building to be able to move to phase 3 or 4 (or indeed begin at phase 2 or 3) whilst a smaller one remains at phase 1. Individual assessment will be required.

Phase 1	Clergy team plus single instrumentalist
Phase 2	Clergy team plus instrumentalist and lead singer
Phase 3	Clergy team plus instrumental group and more than one vocalist

Principles:

1. Identify and then create the most useful/suitable/acceptable/sustainable spaces for music-making to occupy.
2. Risk assess this to be able to match the possibilities of music that can fit 1. (above)
3. Apply a realistic, honest approach to designing what might be possible.
4. TALK and share the plans with a formative group in your church – keeping the emphasis on positive, making things possible.
5. INVOLVE people in the discussion so that people can feel ownership – such as inviting members of a choir to suggest improvements to your identified strategy.
6. A need to balance some kind of continuity with the ‘before’ with the new possibilities of ‘now’ is necessary, to avoid resistance and unsettling the congregation (and the musicians).

‘Performing’ space for musicians:	Stage or gathered area; usually chairs, or standing for some
Profile/age of musicians:	Mixed
Parameter considerations:	Difficult to space out the musicians for musical ensemble purposes; but the effect on the congregation likely not to change very much (the sound largely arriving via amplification).
Safety considerations:	Handling and adjusting of sound equipment (microphones, leads, amps etc) Printed music copies (usually working from photocopies anyway)
Musical possibilities and considerations:	Size of performing group may need to reduce to fit the space given the need for physical distancing. There is no particular need to modify the musical offering.

Model B: Parish Church with organ, perhaps instrumentalists and mixed-age choir

(See note about phases at Model A above)

- Phase 1 Clergy team plus organist
- Phase 2 Clergy team plus organist and cantor and/or solo instrumentalist
- Phase 3 Clergy team plus organist and small vocal group
- Phase 4 Clergy team plus organist and medium-sized choir

Principles: See Model A above

Typical 'performing' space for musicians:	Inflexible space; choir stalls and organ at East End/chancel, or perhaps additional choir seats for some services.
Profile/age of musicians:	Mixed. Children and adults; many adults will be older (implication of greater risk/vulnerability) or from households with older members.
Parameter considerations:	May need to decide to set up the church space either as choir-based, or congregation-focused, especially if seating inflexible. Different age profiles of the choir may need entirely different arrangements (e.g. children, adults, older adults).
Safety considerations:	Gathering of groups – best placement space. Revised robing arrangements. Safe spacing of musicians. Shape of singing formation. Space between choir and congregation. Safe arrangements for music copies. Assigned spaces for each singer (to avoid cross-contamination) How to make best use of Government testing, when available. Entries and exits, and clear routes around the building. Need to arrange for personal provision of e.g. water bottles Supervision of young people. Staggered arrivals/departures.
Musical possibilities and considerations:	Consider more straightforward music to minimise rehearsal requirements. Divide the singers into groups might work on an alternate basis for different services. Plan shorter, focused sessions removing e.g. social breaks. (these would have to happen OUTSIDE the building and with the right kind of physical distancing) Link this live music making to online-type rehearsals – minimising the time in the building and in personal contact. Possibility to establish a pooled body of rehearsal tracks.

Model C: Smaller Cathedral/Larger Church with choir and perhaps some weekday sung services

(See note about phases at Model A above)

- Phase 1 Clergy team plus organist (Organ 'Mass'?)
 Phase 2 Clergy team plus organist and cantor *and/or* instrumentalist
 Phase 3 Clergy team plus organist and adult choir ensemble (4-8 aged 16+)
 Phase 4 reduced group child Choristers + <8 adults (aged 16+)
 (choristers operating in year group 'bubbles' as per school activity)
Or
 Worship band (max 6 players)
 Phase 5 Clergy team plus organist and full choir

Principles: See Model A above

Typical 'performing' space for musicians:	Inflexible space; choir stalls and organ at East End/Quire/Lady Chapel, or perhaps additional choir seats for some services
Profile/age of musicians:	Mixed. Children and adults; some adults will be older (implication of greater risk/vulnerability). Use Choral Scholar team where appropriate?
Parameter considerations:	May need to decide to set up the church space either as choir-based, or congregation-focused, especially if seating inflexible. Different age profiles of the choir may need entirely different arrangements (e.g. children, adults, older adults).
Safety considerations:	Gathering of groups – best placement space. Revised robing arrangements. Safe spacing of musicians. Shape of singing formation. Space between choir and congregation. Safe arrangements for music copies. Assigned spaces for each singer (to avoid cross-contamination) How to make best use of Government testing, when available. Entries and exits, and clear routes around the building. Need to arrange for personal provision of e.g. water bottles Supervision of young people. Consider asking all singers to take their temperature before coming to rehearsals and services staying at home if it is high.
Musical possibilities and considerations:	Consider more straightforward music to minimise rehearsal requirements. Divide the singers into groups might work on an alternate basis for different services. Plan shorter, focused sessions removing e.g. social breaks. (these would have to happen OUTSIDE the building and with the right kind of physical distancing) Link this live music making to online-type rehearsals – minimising the time in the building and in personal contact. Possibility to establish a pooled body of rehearsal tracks.

Model D: Larger Cathedral with daily choral services

(See note about phases at Model A above)

Phase 1 Clergy team plus organist (organ music at otherwise “said” service)

Phase 2 Clergy team plus organist and cantor *and/or* instrumentalist

Phase 3 Clergy team plus organist and reduced choir ensemble

Phase 4 Clergy team plus organist and full choir

Principles: See Model A above

Typical ‘performing’ space for musicians:	Large space; choir stalls and organ at East End/Quire/Lady Chapel; flexibility for arranging singers over a larger area whilst maintaining distancing for choir and congregation.
Profile/age of musicians:	Mixed. Children and adults; some adults will be older (implication of greater risk/vulnerability). Many adults will be professional singers.
Parameter considerations:	<p>Where Quire is visible from the Nave, consider devoting this space to physically- distanced singers (same positions each day). Children may be allowed to group in physically distanced ‘clusters’ (link with school guidance). Congregation sits in Nave only, arranged to enable distancing.</p> <p>Where Quire is separate from the Nave (organ screen), consider this space being temporarily cordoned off and used as physically-distanced vestry space for singers/clergy. Eastern end of large Nave arranged to allow appropriately distanced adults on each side, and children in groups. Groups and positions remain the same each day.</p> <p>Rehearsal rooms: consider ventilation and spacing in clusters for younger choristers in accordance with guidance.</p>
Safety considerations:	<p>Gathering of groups – best placement space.</p> <p>Revised robing arrangements – more easily achieved in larger space.</p> <p>Safe spacing of musicians.</p> <p>Shape of singing formation.</p> <p>Space between choir and congregation.</p> <p>Safe arrangements for music copies.</p> <p>Assigned spaces for each singer (to avoid cross-contamination)</p> <p>How to make best use of Government testing, when available.</p> <p>Entries and exits, and clear routes around the building.</p> <p>Need to arrange for personal provision of e.g. water bottles</p> <p>Supervision of young people.</p> <p>Consider asking all singers to take their temperature before coming to rehearsals and services staying at home if it is high.</p>
Musical possibilities and considerations:	<p>Consider repertoire in the light of temporary layout and rehearsal time.</p> <p>Consider recorded or live streaming of services to reach wider group.</p>

The church music sub-group of the C of E Recovery Group is indebted to all its members for their valued contributions to this paper:

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