

Our Music, Our Faith

July 18 & 19, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

As I mentioned in my first letter to you, my upcoming columns will be dedicated to explaining further the impact of COVID-19 on our liturgical music. One of the aspects of participating in Mass that many of us miss the most is singing the Mass itself, plus our favorite and personally cherished hymns. COVID-19 and its high rate of transmission have affected nearly all aspects of life, including making music together. I hope that sharing the following information will lead to a greater understanding of why congregational and group singing must be limited until the medical community deems it safe. The following information is from an expert panel assembled on May 5th by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorus America, the Barbershop Harmony Society, and the Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA).

The virus travels faster and further when we sing.

There is no spacing solution that eliminates the risk. Lack of proper ventilation is a primary cause to spread the aerosolized virus. Even multiple changes of air per hour in the room or an ultraviolet light may not fully eliminate the virus, which can infect people at the micron level and can travel as far as 16 feet when singing.

Masks don't provide safe methods for singing.

On masks, Dr. Lucinda Halstead, the president of the Performing Arts Medical Association and the Medical Director of the Department of Otolaryngology at the University of South Carolina, states, "there are no barriers currently safe for singing." An N95 mask may provide some measure of safety if fit-tested, but it would be "difficult to breathe," "hot," "decrease the levels of oxygen with rebreathing," "cause headaches with an increase of CO2," and "could injure people with significant health issues, like asthma." Please note that the above concerns relate only to singing while wearing a mask, not the wearing of masks in general.

Choir rehearsals have already proven to be "superspreader" events.

Within days of a March choir practice in Mount Vernon, Washington, those who attended began showing symptoms of COVID-19. Most of the choir's members are older women, and women comprised 85% of the choir cases. The median age of those infected was 69 years old. Excluding the superspreader, 52 of the 60 singers (or 86.7%) became ill. However, only 32 had a test to confirm the illness; the other 20 likely had it, based on their symptoms, said Skagit County Public Health, which interviewed all of the members present.

This is a humbling time for all of us; we are forced to abandon or alter our own preferred ways of life for the greater good of our communities. It is my sincere hope and prayer that a vaccine and/or effective treatment become widely available soon, so that we all may resume participating in the musical aspects of worship together. We pray for this in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, from whom all good things flow.

AMDG,



Dr. R. Ryan Endris