



May 21, 2020

To: Pastors, vice-chairs, music directors
From: Provincial Elders' Conference
Subject: Choirs, bands, and congregational singing

As states and communities loosen restrictions on gatherings and activities, our congregations must consider the safety of all who come into our services, especially the most vulnerable. Our church gatherings must be safe places where we fiercely protect the health and well-being of all. Scientists who have spent decades studying the transmission of viruses and other particles through the air, and who have been applying that research to the novel coronavirus and its resulting illness, COVID-19, have determined that ***there is no safe way to sing together until there is a vaccine for COVID-19 that is widely available, and a treatment protocol that is 95% effective in producing a cure for the disease. This may be 18 to 24 months in the future.*** This conclusion is backed by the following four factors.

1. *There is no spacing solution for singers that would eliminate risk.* During singing or even reading aloud in a full voice, virus particles may travel through the air more than 15 feet from the speaker/singer. For outdoor services, a breeze may transmit those particles even farther, and as the wind shifts, so does the direction of transmission.
2. *There are no masks or other barriers that are safe for singing.*
3. *The current standard testing has a 3 to 5% false-negative rating – in other words, 3 to 5 percent of the people who test negative really do have the virus.ⁱ*
4. *A carrier of the virus exudes a significant quantity of virus particles days before showing any symptoms – having no way of knowing he/she is carrying the disease.ⁱⁱ*

Based upon this science, the PEC offers these guidelines for both indoor and outdoor services:

1. Do not include congregational or choral singing for in-person services (whether indoor or outdoor). Hymns may be sung by a soloist – standing at least 15 feet from anyone else, including an accompanist – or no more than 4 people, each 15 feet away from the others. Alternatively, the hymn text may be read aloud by an individual. Humming by a group of people is not a safe alternative.
2. Church bands, wind ensembles, and brass choirs should not meet. Playing wind instruments involves a great deal of air pressure through the horn, and virus particles may be transmitted great distances from the player. One or two players may play if they are facing away from one another and minimally 20 feet from anyone else in the space. If outdoors, the wind should not be at the player's back.
3. In praying the liturgies, we recommend having one voice represent the congregation's responses rather than having multiple people speaking aloud together.

We ask that you abide by these restrictions, distressing though they are, until further notice. While music has been a key feature of Moravian worship since our very beginnings, it should not be practiced under circumstances that put any of our brothers and sisters at risk.

Resources for Further Study

Factors leading to the conclusion that there is no safe way to sing include the following:

On Tuesday, May 5, the National Association of Teachers of Singing, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Chorus America, Barbershop Harmony Society, and Performing Arts Medical Association (PAMA) presented an important webinar about the near-term future of singing, in the search for fact-based solutions to protect singers, teachers, and conductors, entitled “What Do Science and Data Say About the Near-Term Future of Singing?”.

Guest panelists were:

- Dr. Donald Milton, a leading researcher whose work focuses on the interrelated areas of infectious bioaerosols, exhaled breath analysis, and development and application of innovative methods for respiratory epidemiology. Dr. Milton is Professor of Environmental Health, University of Maryland School of Public Health, with a secondary appointment in the School of Medicine.
- Otolaryngologist Dr. Lucinda Halstead, is founder and medical director of the Evelyn Trammell Institute for Voice and Swallowing at the Medical University of South Carolina. She is also President Elect of the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA).
- Mollie Quinlan-Hayes is director of ArtsReady, a national initiative of South Arts. She most recently served as deputy director at South Arts.
- Tom Claeson is project director of Performing Arts Readiness, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to help performing arts organizations protect their assets, sustain operations, and prepare for emergencies.

To see the webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF13GsVzj6Q>

The presenters' slides are also available at

https://www.nats.org/cgi/page.cgi/_article.html/Featured_Stories_/NATS_COVID_Resources_Page

- The **Moravian Music Foundation** has a video summarizing and commenting on the webinar titled, [“When Can We Sing?”](#)

ⁱ These first 3 factors are taken from the webinar cited above.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMe2009758>, from the *New England Journal of Medicine*, April 24, 2020.