



Devizes ST John & ST Mary

Procedure for the Safe Return of the Choir

Version 4: Tuesday 1st September

Introduction

Following the Government's announcement that non-professional choirs are permitted to sing indoors in front of worshippers from 15th August, and bearing in mind the Performing Arts guidance already available, the Royal School of Church Music has worked in collaboration with the Church of England to produce a document entitled "Guidance for Safely Resuming Group Music-making in Church". The latest version can be found here:

<http://www.rscm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FAQs-re-Resumption-of-Singing.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1ZJwjys7qAcEg35W4SHU6qflp42GTKW3DvJWc4RrITQPJxDaZHfsTBnxs>

In addition, a preliminary report released on 20th August into research carried out by the University of Bristol, steered by Declan Costello, a surgeon specialising in voice disorders, and funded by Public Health England, makes the following suggestion towards a safe pathway: "Guidelines should create recommendations based on the volume and duration of the vocalisation, the number of participants and the environment in which the activity occurs."

Safely Resuming Choir Activities at St John's

Having scrutinised the RSCM document, Alan Martin and Chris Totney met in church on Sunday 23rd August to discuss a way forward for the choir. **The following guidelines, which will feed into the required Risk Assessment, were approved at the PCC Meeting on Tuesday 25th August, subject to a number of amendments following the discussion which have now been made:**

1) The choir will be split into two groups, with a mixture of children and adults in each group, decided in advance by the Director of Music, with each group singing on alternate Sundays. In line with social distancing requirements, we now have 14 spaces (up from 12 - see highlighted section at end) available in the choir stalls (including the Corporation Stalls at the far east end) and High Altar areas, plus up to three behind the choir stalls in the North Transept (i.e. the coffee area). Further possible spaces were identified in the Beauchamp Chapel but, following the 'pilot' event on Sunday 30th August, it was decided not to use this area (see highlighted section at end). Up to two choir members from the same household will be allowed to sit together in the same place. This means we have 17 usable places but it is anticipated that only a maximum of 16 of these will be required on any particular Sunday and that the total number of singers will not exceed 18. At the PCC Meeting on Tuesday 25th August, it was agreed to move the reader and intercessor in order to accommodate the maximum safe number of singers, with the reader now stationed near the grand piano and the intercessor leading the prayers from a regular seat within the congregational pews.

- 2) There will be no Friday evening practices due to the recommendations on limiting rehearsal time and also because of the ideal need for the building to remain closed for 72 hour periods. Attendance by individual choir members will therefore only be required on every other Sunday, barring a small number of exceptions as deemed necessary by the Director of Music.
- 3) The Director of Music will arrive early to ventilate the building and, having taken appropriate precautions, will place the required musical items and orders of service in each person's place. Places will be named and a map provided in the organ area so that everyone can head straight to their places.
- 4) The choir will be asked to arrive through the South Door during a designated five-minute window beginning at 9.30am, sanitising their hands as they enter and heading eastwards past the organ, through the Beauchamp Chapel to their places. Parents will not be permitted to enter the building unless they are attending the service, in which case, they should head round to the North Door, which is the entry point for members of the congregation. A rehearsal will then begin at 9.40am, lasting until approximately 10.15am.
- 5) Everyone who is aged 11 or over will be required to wear a mask on arrival and at all times except when engaged in singing. This includes during all other parts of the service.
- 6) No physical contact will be permitted between choir members from different households.
- 7) Choir members will turn inwards to sing at an appropriate angle, in order to avoid singing face-to-face or in a direct line towards anyone in front of them once the angle is taken into account.
- 8) Toilet facilities will be opened in the Parish Rooms for choir use between the end of the rehearsal (10.15am) and the start of the service, and it has been arranged for these to be cleaned on Monday mornings. Choir members who do not wish to use the toilets at this time must remain in their seats and not leave or wander round the building for any other purpose (e.g. for socialising during the break). Any child wishing to use the toilet will be escorted over to the Parish Rooms by a designated adult to ensure that social distancing is maintained within the Parish Rooms. Those visiting the Parish Rooms will leave church via the Beauchamp Door (which must be locked by another designated adult once they have left the building), before returning to church via the South Door and sanitising hands on re-entry.
- 9) Choir members should bring their own water. There will be no coffee for adults during the break.
- 10) There will be no processions by the choir and robes will not be worn. Choir members will be encouraged to dress smartly.
- 11) The choir will sing two pieces of music at each service. The Archdeacon has recommended that no hymns or parts of the Mass Setting are sung in order to discourage members of the congregation from joining in. Music will be carefully chosen so as to avoid it being of an unnecessarily high volume or long duration.
- 12) The Choir must remain in their places for the entire duration of the organ voluntary at the end of the service. Once the voluntary is over, the Director of Music will dismiss the choir in an orderly fashion via the South Door. This will only be possible once the congregation has dispersed

and is no longer in the way of the choir's exit route. Parents must not enter the building to collect children unless they have attended the service, or congregate too close to the South Door.

13) The tidying away of copies will be dealt with solely by the Director of Music after the service.

14) The Director of Music will be responsible for keeping a record of attendance every Sunday for track and trace purposes, together with a map of where everyone was seated.

15) It is proposed to have a 'pilot' event with a slightly smaller group of choir members singing one piece of music during the distribution of communion at the service this Sunday, 30th August, with up to 14 of the designated spaces occupied. A review will take place in church after the service with Gerry Lynch, Chris Totney and Jane Scorer in attendance, along with anyone else who wishes to share any observations. If successful, this procedure will be passed to the Health and Safety Officer for inclusion in the required Risk Assessment and the two groups of singers will commence their duties at the services on Sunday 6th September and Sunday 13th September respectively.

Update following 'pilot' event on Sunday 30th August: Archdeacon Sue and Gerry Lynch met with Peter Crofts, Jane Scorer and Chris Totney after the service on Sunday 30th August, at which 14 members of the choir sang, for a debrief. The general feeling was very positive, except that it was clear that the Beauchamp Chapel could not realistically be used by any of the singers due to the very poor line of sight to the conductor. However, it was noted that the two chairs which are currently stationed against the east wall (i.e. level with the High Altar, one on each side) were at least two metres behind the other two seats in the Sanctuary occupied by the choir and, as such, it was agreed that these could be used in future instead. It was also widely thought that the choir should sing a piece of music at the time a Gradual Hymn would normally occur, in order to split the Epistle and the Gospel readings. This will be in addition to a Communion Motet.

16) This procedure will continue to be reviewed following the last service of each month but suggestions for improvements are welcomed at any time.

Subject to the necessary amendments, which have now been made, this document was approved at the PCC Meeting on Tuesday 25th August. Following the 'pilot' event on Sunday 30th August, other amendments were discussed and agreed by those present and these are highlighted in yellow on this document. As such, it is now ready to be passed to the Health and Safety Officer.

The RSCM has actively encouraged all interested parties to contribute ideas and suggestions to this procedure in order to try and create as safe an environment for everyone as possible. To this end, please do not hesitate to email christotney@gmail.com if you have any comments at any time. Thank you for your support.