

How Can We Keep from Singing?

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There is a lot of excitement among many people regarding re-opening our Catholic Churches for Mass in our Diocese. Unfortunately, it will be quieter than usual.

Using the best scientific, medical, musical and liturgical advice, choirs and congregations will not sing until further notice in the Diocese of Madison (and in many Dioceses across the USA and around the world).

I have to say, that's a sentence I never thought I'd write! I have been a singer, choir director and church musician for my entire adult life. I've given many workshops and written numerous articles on the importance of music in the Mass. Even so, research is showing that singing raises the risk of passing on the Coronavirus and for that reason, it's the proper response of the Church at this time.

Even before our quarantine took effect, we were hearing anecdotes about the risk of the virus infecting singers. The first and most notable came from the Skagit Valley Chorale (Washington) when they met for rehearsals on March 3 & 10. Everyone seemed healthy. 7-10 days after the March 3 rehearsal people started getting sick. Within a few weeks 52 of 61 singers had been infected. Some were hospitalized. Two people died. Similar stories have been reported around the world.

Studies show that when singing, the virus can travel well over the six feet of physical distancing required. When we sing, the droplets and aerosol that carry the virus can carry as far as 15 feet and more. When we breathe in, we take extra-large breaths that bring in the air for the next phrase. It's difficult for us to practice social distancing of 15 feet, not to mention that it's exhausting to sing with a mask on. Out of abundance of caution, many churches (Catholic and Protestant) are asking the congregation not to sing.

While there is a consensus among musicians, scientists and the health care community, there is ongoing research (not yet validated by peer review) being done on what other factors may have affected the choir singers from the Skagit Valley Chorale, such as mingling during a break, sharing cookies and stacking chairs at the end of rehearsal. This will all become clearer in the future and as this develops we'll let you know. Studies continue and we hope that our congregations and choirs will be lifting their voices soon.

There still can be music. Cantors with an organist or pianist are permissible. In many cases they will provide music for the acclamations. If that is the case at your parish, listen and focus on the words that they are singing. Have you ever pondered the words of the *Glory to God* or the *Holy*? Both are beautiful ancient texts that teach us a lot about our relationship with God—one that praises, blesses, adores and magnifies until in joy we sing “Hosanna in the highest!”

While our voices may not be raised in song to God at Mass for some time, our hearts and souls can't help but sing his praise in joy.

If you have questions, please call the Office of Worship at (608) 821-3080 or email me at patrick.gorman@madisondiocese.org or associate director Amy Yanzer at amy.yanzer@madisondiocese.org. Visit us on the internet at www.madisondiocese.org/worship or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/WorshipMadison.

*Saint Cecilia, please intercede on our behalf;
may this virus be driven from the world.
Keep us all safe
and may all who sing to the Lord
carry on the Paschal Hymn of praise in their hearts
until that day when we join the glorious heavenly choir
who sings God's praise for ever.*