

Singing in Church Con't

serious risk for anyone unlucky enough to breathe them in. Singers are therefore considered “super-spreaders.” And exactly how far each person emits is unpredictable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, choral conductors are at particularly high risk of contracting the virus due to their customary position in front of the rest of the group.

On March 17, 2020, just less than a week after the WHO declared the coronavirus to be a global pandemic, sixty-one people gathered for a choir rehearsal in Skagit County, Washington. They took all reasonable precautions, using hand sanitizer and social distancing. Although no one knew it at the time, one of the singers was COVID-19 positive. In the days that followed, 87% of the group contracted COVID-19, and [two people died](#). More recently we've learned that a [chorus of 130 singers in Amsterdam](#) performed a concert on March 8, five days before the country went on lockdown. After the concert, 102 singers fell sick with coronavirus, and four people associated with the chorus died. The conductor fell ill and was hospitalized.

It might be tempting to think that church services are safe from these dangers, particularly in relatively self-contained communities, such as monasteries. But recent headlines about outbreaks in religious communities in [America](#) and in Orthodox countries like [Ukraine](#) suggest that the high risks associated with choir rehearsals and concerts are present anywhere people gather and sing.

Recently, the choral community was rocked by a webinar co-hosted by the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) and the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) entitled, “What Science and Data Say about the Near-term Future of Singing” (view the full 2.5 hour webinar [here](#), and an accurate written summary [here](#)). The medical experts laid out some difficult facts, concluding that there is no safe way for choirs to sing together until a vaccine is widely available or a 95% effective treatment is in place. Masks do not sufficiently contain the aerosol spread caused by singing. And because singers breathe deeply, wearing a mask increases the carbon dioxide they inhale. Nor does the customary 6-ft social distancing recommendation protect singers from

the virus, due to the varying aerosol clouds emitted by singers. As such, these experts recommended that all in-person group singing activities be postponed through the fall and perhaps longer. As a result, many choral groups around the world are now suspending their rehearsals, performances, and in-person singing, either opting to postpone gathering in person until it is safe (which could be 1-2 years, in the estimation of some experts), or choosing to pivot to online formats.

All this means that as we prepare to reopen our churches, we must carefully consider the high risks associated with choral singing. For Orthodox churches, such high-risk activities also include any form of chant, the exclamations of the clergy, the reading of scripture or other texts with raised voices, and even the faithful singing along with “Lord have mercy.” This is difficult news for many of us.

When we return to church, how will we strive to protect one another? Reducing the number of clergy and singers to a bare minimum seems like an obvious starting point. One isolated chanter replacing the choir will undoubtedly help reduce risk. Beyond this, will we embrace [more silence](#) in our services? Will we [suspend congregational singing completely](#), as others have done? Will we utilize microphones to avoid raising our voices and amplifying the aerosol spread? Can we encourage paraliturgical activities to supplement our services, such as singing at home with our families or gathering with parishioners online?

This is a time for robust dialogue and creative thinking. We Orthodox often speak of the beauty of our churches, icons, and sacred music. But during this difficult time, let us also seek beauty in our love for one another. For “if I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Christos Anesti! Alithós Anésti! *Greek*

John 9:1-38 (*Gospel*)

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" Some said, "This is he." Others said, "He is like him." He said, "I am he." Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know." They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore

his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

CATASTROPHIC RELIEF FUND

Purpose of fund: To provide some small financial assistance to a parishioner, family member or community member who has suffered a catastrophic event.

Funds will be offered at the discretion & blessing of the Rector and the discretion of the Board.

Two parishioners have given a portion of their stimulus checks to this fund. Please feel free to donate as well. Thank you and God bless!



Acts 16:16-34 (Epistle)

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

FROM ANOTHER BULLETIN

By Anonymous

Have you noticed how many experts have come out of the woodwork during this pandemic? Each of us has become an immunologist, an epidemiologist, and a theologian. We know all about herd immunity and how to achieve it. We know what causes pandemics and whether the declaration of this one is valid. We know who is healthy and who is not, and I surely don't fall into the latter category....at all. We are expert theologians who know what the Church should be doing and how to get it done. And unquestionably, the Church's Bishops and priests are certainly entitled to our opinions. The question is, are they entitled to our support?

Since about mid-March our nation and her leaders have been dealing with managing the spread of COVID-19. They made hard decisions, most of which we don't like. We've been sure to voice our opinions on what they're doing wrong, and more importantly, should have done, via email, billboard, letter, social media and conversation. Our doctors, nurses, EMTs, local police and state police have been working to save lives. Our State officials have shut down restaurants, stores, and other crowd-gathering places to stop the spread of this deadly virus.

At the same time, we've shown our support for others by:

- ordering take out from our favorite restaurant,
- providing meals to our first responders,
- wearing masks in public, and
- going against our very human nature and staying away from each other.

For the most part, we've been very good at complying and supporting our nation's measures. How good have we been at supporting our Church and Her leadership; our Bishops and priests?

Just the other day I learned that several Bishops and priests have received vile-worded letters and email from some of these "new experts." On one hand, letters are saying they "have no faith" for keeping the Church doors closed, not celebrating the Divine Services, not allowing candles to be lit/prayers to be said/icons to be venerated, and especially not serving the Holy Mysteries. On the other hand, letters are declaring the Faithful "can get the virus from the Holy Mysteries" and they are killing

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people by allowing communion. Jesus Christ Himself showed respect for the leaders of His time, even to the one who ordered His crucifixion. Can we, should we, show anything less for ours?¹

With such division and lack of respect for The Church leadership, how do we move forward? Can we move forward....in unity?² We have before us a stellar opportunity to witness to the entire world what it means to be an Orthodox Christian....a follower of the Christ, the Prince of PEACE.

First and foremost, we must set aside our god called "self." This virus has held a mirror in front of each and every one of our faces and what is reflected back is ugly. Rushing to the store to grab carts of toilet paper, paper towels, sanitizers so the elderly cannot even find them. We are glued to social media. There were parents overheard saying, "We've never spent so much time with our children as we have during this lock down. We usually work 13 hours a day." How said is that? This modern-day plague has revealed all that we hold dear:

- our personal opinion – expressed with disregard and disrespect to our church leadership and fellow mankind,
- our lack of care for our environment,
- our lack of time for our families and children, and
- our lack of care, time and respect for our elderly and poor.

This virus has stripped away the securities and identities we cling to, exposing ...the gods we....worship."

Secondly, and just as importantly, we must repent and make amends with those we've offended. With humility sending a note of apology, biting back a sarcastic word, reining in anger and going to confession are the best places to start. We would do well to follow the advice of St. James when he said, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen,

slow to speak and slow to become angry," and "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."¹ Allow a *pause* between what you hear and your response.

When our Bishops and priests outline plans to reopen our Churches, understand they are doing the best that they can in circumstances under which they have never experienced. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." says St. Paul to the Philippian church. Exercise patience. We are all in a hurry to return to Divine Liturgy in order to receive the Most Holy Mysteries. We can't move faster than any in our communities can understand or accept. Some people will be afraid to step outside their door, to attend church and even to receive Holy Communion. They should not be made to feel ashamed. Likewise, those who do go out, attend church and receive Holy Communion should do so without boasting and in all humility, with understanding and patience.

Pray for the Bishops and priests. They have the burden of being among the "first responders" to whom we turn when we are in spiritual pain, feeling lost and not understanding the "why" of life in a pandemic. Like us, they are doing the best they can. We must offer them God's mercy, just as they offer us God's mercy.

As Abbot Tryphon has so eloquently written, "Remembering that nothing is allowed by God that is without salvific benefits, we will find ourselves, once again, standing next to our friends, relatives, and fellow believers, celebrating the Divine Liturgy, perhaps even experiencing it as never before. The City of God is on a high hill, standing brightly before us, and we have reason to rejoice."

Don't let this crisis go to waste!

¹ James 1:19; 1:26²

¹ John 18:28-40

² Psalm 133:2 - How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!³

Hristos a-înviat ; Adevărat a-înviat

Romanian