



NEWSLETTER September 21st 2020

To all members and member churches of EHCCA from Derek Harrison

Firstly, we (myself and the committee) do hope you have all kept well through these extraordinary times. I hope this Newsletter will reassure you that we are still here and that it will be helpful to have these notes – though many of you may well be aware of it all. Inevitably the guidance can only be up to date as of now. The regulations have been changing with some rapidity and will most probably continue to do so.

The big question is can church choirs sing together in rehearsal and in services? As a member of the local (St Albans) RSCM area committee, I have been seeing some of the to and fro of announcements since last Monday (14th September). I understand that this was posted on the RSCM Sarum website on the late afternoon of Friday 18th September.



1. **So can we resume choir practice as usual?** *Following the announcement that live indoor performances can resume from 15 August with socially distanced audiences, DCMS have updated the Performing Arts guidance to confirm that non-professionals can now engage in all performing arts activities, including singing, wind and brass. Such activity must take place in line with the performing arts guidance. Where non-professional groups plan to meet, there are no set limits on the numbers who can be involved when taking place outside and/or in Covid-secure venues. This is in line with rules on [meeting people outside your household](#) for clubs and groups and gatherings in Covid-secure venues. Organisations must ensure that they carry out an appropriate Covid-19 risk assessment and that individuals are socially distanced at all times. Organisations will want to minimise risk as far as possible and the Performing Arts guidance sets out a number of mitigations that should be considered to minimise risk including operating outside where possible, limiting the numbers involved in and duration of activity and considering how ventilation can be improved. Think about how to keep your rehearsals as efficient as possible and consider how you can continue to use technology to rehearse the music in advance via online methods.*

Rehearsals should take place within the place of worship for any choir over 6 in number – not in buildings which fall outside the church footprint (e.g. a church hall or community facility)

The use of church premises by non-church (secular) choirs and other music groups for rehearsal is currently being urgently clarified with relevant government departments. We will update this as soon as information is available.

2. **How many can be in the choir?** *This will be informed by your own local risk assessment of space available (following 2m between singers). Good ventilation and duty of care towards singers are both essential. There is therefore no concrete answer to this question. Again, please refer to Government guidance on a safe return to singing for professional and non-professional choirs.*

The 'Rule of 6' does not apply to church choirs, but social distancing and mitigation measures (e.g. screens, cleaning, and other routines) must be in place.

3. **Can children sing?** *Yes, as long as you have fully risk-assessed the numbers involved. Additional guidance is supplied in the accompanying document: 'models for playing and singing'*

Area Choirs Festival 17th October While writing, much effort is being put in by the local RSCM team for the virtual ACF next month. Please have a look at the local RSCM website (<http://www.rscm-stalbans.co.uk/>) for details and sign in for it if you can. I know several choirs joined in the highly successful Festival Evensong in July. Of course, anyone in the world can join in so do spread the word!

The service will be led by the Dean of St Albans (Jeffrey John), the sermon will be given by the Bishop (Alan Smith, the Patron of EHCCA) the Master of the Music (Andrew Lucas) will play the final voluntary (on the cathedral organ). Lovely music is planned so it should be another great event. Incidentally most if not all other RSCM areas around the country have cancelled their ACF services so, to quote a member of the RSCM head office team, St Albans is way ahead of everyone else!

Finally, any news you would like to share would be most welcome (please send any notes to Dorothy – email address as in the covering email). It would seem most churches have been using various combinations of online audio and video, live and recorded to keep music as part of the liturgy. Very well done to everyone who has been doing that. In addition to learning lots of new skills, it takes many hours to compile the videos and audio tracks.

I hope you found the notes from the local area zoom session in June for “Choir Trainers and Organists” useful. It should have reached you in early July.

Keep safe and well and let us hope we can keep some live music in our churches through the coming months.

Derek Harrison