

The Most Revd. and Right Hon. the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury
Lambeth Palace
General Synod of the Church of England
LONDON
SE1 7JU

08 July 2020

Your Grace,

Music and musicians in the Church of England

The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) is the UK's professional body for musicians and a nationally recognised subject association for music. Since 1882, we have been dedicated to promoting the importance of music and protecting the rights of those working in the music profession. We support approximately 10,000 musicians across the UK with legal advice and representation, professional development, and campaigns.

We represent several hundred musicians working in churches across the country. We are writing on their behalf because of the serious crisis now facing professional music in churches.

In the last two days alone we have heard shocking news of two choirs disbanding: the choir at Holy Trinity, in London's Sloane Square, and the professional choir at St Margaret's Westminster – much loved and known by many as the parish church of the House of Commons.

We are hearing similar stories from across the country, and many of our members have been in touch this week to tell us about the crisis now engulfing them.

The reason given in all these cases is that COVID-19 guidance from government says that choirs and other forms of singing represent an unacceptable risk of COVID-19 transmissions except in the most limited circumstances.

Of course, we must all do as much as we can to limit the spread of this terrible virus.

But we cannot help but consider that the actions of so many churches, in dismissing musicians and casting many individuals into unemployment in the middle of a pandemic, appear precipitate. At this stage, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has still not released guidelines for safer practices for choirs and singing.

Despite this, job losses and the loss of professional music in churches is happening already. A glorious musical tradition – of which the Church is the custodian – will be lost forever unless there is immediate, practical action to save jobs and support musicians.



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The Church of England should be drawing upon its considerable resources to support all professional musicians during this stage of the pandemic, and to ensure that their posts will survive. Recorded music is no substitute for the choir, the soloist or the organ: this is to deny the huge power of music in spiritual settings, and to fail to serve congregations appropriately.

There is an increasing body of research from around the world about COVID-19 and safety in musical performance. We have just completed our own global literature review of the research to date. We believe this research could offer much to the government in terms of practical, imaginative options to help bring back choirs and singing to our churches and other public places.

We believe that music in the Church of England needs a co-ordinated, UK-wide approach from its leadership. We also want to see the government's official advice about music in places of worship take practical account the range of reduced-risk options now being generated in scientific research, and to link this to a scheduled reinstatement of music and musicians in services across the country. Recorded music, while perhaps a reasonable temporary measure in a crisis, can never be allowed to become the permanent default in our places of worship.

This in turn requires concrete financial support for musicians in churches and other places of worship to protect those whose livelihoods and careers have been affected by the current or future closure of churches across the country.

We call upon the Church to take immediate action to ensure no more musicians, choristers or music directors are dismissed.

This precious tradition of music in our churches is in grave danger. There is still a chance retrieve matters, but only if there is action now.

We await your urgent reply.

Yours sincerely,



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