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## Copyright and the Church

*From UCC Worship, Liturgy & Spiritual Formation*

Read the full article at [ucc.org/music-arts\\_copyright-and-the-church](http://ucc.org/music-arts_copyright-and-the-church)

*The questions and answers presented here are for informational purposes. It is always a good idea to contact the copyright holder directly or a copyright attorney if the answers provided here are not adequate for your situation.*

**“What is copyright?”** “Copyright” is the legal protection of a creative work.

Using a work without permission that is under copyright is against the law and penalties can be financially severe. There is no exemption from copyright law for churches....

**“Where do I find copyright information?”** A good way to see who holds the copyright is to look for the notice at the bottom of the first page or in an index in the front or back of a collection....

**“When is it necessary to seek permission to use a copyrighted work?”** The simple answer is: **always**. Whenever a copyrighted work is reproduced in any form, permission must be obtained. This applies to print, projection, recording, web-based uses (live streaming or services such as YouTube or Vimeo), and any other form, even those yet to be developed. This applies to bulletins, song books, handouts, projections, recordings for shut-ins, an “extra” copy for the accompanist, videos of worship services and “special” services (such as musicals, children’s Christmas programs, etc.)—anytime you reproduce a copyrighted work you need to ask permission.

**Additional questions answered in the article include:**

**“Can I make a new arrangement of a copyrighted song?”**

**“I don’t have time to contact the copyright owner.”**

**“We have lots of photocopies of choir music. What should I do with them?”**

**“What does it hurt to use copyrighted works illegally?”**

**“Do I need permission to ‘perform’ music in a worship service?”**

**“My church makes audio/video recordings of worship for shut-ins. Must I obtain permission?”**

**“My church produces instant DVDs of worship. We need permission, right?”**

**“What is a mechanical license?”**

**“What license do I need to web-stream our worship service?”**

**“I see songs, worship services, and stuff posted on YouTube all the time. I’m**

**sure that they didn’t ask for permission. Why can’t I do the same?”**

**“I think the song that I want to use is Public Domain. How can I be sure?”**

**“My friend said that as long as I claim ‘fair use’ I will be protected by copyright law.”**

**“I want to help my choir learn their part in the music, so I’m making recordings of each part. Do I need permission?”**

**“What music licensing companies are available to churches and which one should I use?”**

**www.OneLicense.net** - Most music copyrighted by The Pilgrim Press is handled by [www.OneLicense.net](http://www.OneLicense.net).... Remember, the only way that the copyright holder gets paid when you use a license is for you to report the usage of the song to the licensing company. Please report your song usage as required by your license.

**www.CCLI.com** - CCLI offer copyright licensing, rehearsal licensing, church streaming and podcast licensing, church video licensing, ScreenVue (for using movie clips during worship), and SongSelect....

**www.LicenSingOnline.org** - LicenSingOnline offers single use, weekly use, or annual licenses....

**“My congregational uses *The New Century Hymnal*. Because it was published by The Pilgrim Press does that mean I’m free to reprint the hymns?”** No. But, good try! Beginning on page 888 of *The New Century Hymnal* are the copyright listings....

**“We just purchased *Sing! Prayer and Praise* and want to reprint music and project words. Is there a blanket permission to do this?”** No....

**“My church uses backgrounds for projections. I often find great pictures on the internet. Am I free to use them?”** If you cannot locate the copyright owner, do not use the image. (... A “projection ministry” could be started to create images for worship use.)

**“I want to use film clips to illustrate my sermon. What should I do?”** Film clips are protected by copyright as well. [www.CCLI.com](http://www.CCLI.com) licenses film clips. You will need to use the clips that are available on their website, however.

**Just a note:** copyright permissions are a matter of justice. Copyright owners rely on their royalty income to live, and publishers rely on the income to enable them to make a profit and to produce further resources. To use a copyrighted work without permission is illegal, even if you don’t know that you’re breaking the law. No church would think of bypassing the electric meter to avoid paying electrical costs, but many do a similar illegal activity when they reproduce (without permission) CDs, DVDs, videos, choir music, music from song books and hymnals, and the like. The more you engage in obtaining permissions, the easier it will become.

Prayers are requested for Grace UCC in West Point and Pastor Richard D. Keeler.

