

# GUIDELINES ON USA COPYRIGHT LAWS FOR CHURCH MUSICIANS AND MINISTERS

This guide helps users of church music understand the nature of copyright in order to improve their ministries, to maintain a proper standard of ethics and to protect themselves and their churches from incurring liability or subjecting themselves to the possibility of being embarrassed or even sued. The questions addressed are those most frequently asked by church musicians.

This guide does not presume to be a comprehensive summary of the Copyright Act of 1976. It does not attempt to deal with all the issues covered by the legislation, nor does it provide answers to many legal questions. For a complete copy of the Copyright Law of 1976 write: The Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington DC 20559; or see the website of the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/copyright](http://www.loc.gov/copyright).

## **1. What does "copyright" mean?**

Our nation's founders determined that it was in the public interest that the creative works of a person's mind and spirit could belong, for a limited time, to the creator. The protection of these works is called "copyright."

The United States copyright law grants to any copyright owner the exclusive rights to original material for a term that usually is equal to the length of the life of the author/creator plus 70 years. (For many songs written prior to 1978, the term is 95 years total.)

The copyright owner is the only one who has the privilege of reproducing the work. If any other party wants to reproduce the material in some manner, permission must be obtained from the copyright owner.

Visible notice of copyright should appear on all copies of copy righted material. Whether on the owner's original works or on permitted copies, the notice should be visible and contain the word "copyright" or the symbol © (for printed material) or (p) (for sound recordings), the year of first publication, and the name of the copyright owner.

## **2. What are the rights of copyright owners?**

Copyright owners have the right

- to reproduce the copyrighted work in printed copies or with any duplicating process now known or that later comes into being;
- to make arrangements and adaptations of the copy righted work;
- to distribute and/or sell printed or recorded copies of the work or to license others to do so;
- to perform and/or display the copyrighted work.

## **3. Who owns the legal right to make copies?**

The original creators (authors and composers) and/or publishers, their assigned agents, and so on, can legally make copies of a copyrighted work.

## **4. Do other countries have copyright laws?**

Yes. Most of the world now recognizes the need to give incentive and protection to creative persons. Copyrighted material owned by U.S. citizens is protected in many countries by those countries' copyright laws and treaties with the U.S.

## **5. What if I am faced with a special situation?**

If you want to include copyrighted lyrics in a song, sheet, arrange a copyrighted song for four baritones and kazoo, or make any special use of copyrighted music that the publisher cannot supply in regular published form, the magic word is ask. You may or may not receive permission, but when you use someone else's property, you must have the property owners consent.

#### **6. What if there is no time to write?**

Think of copyrighted music as a piece of property and you will be on the right track. Plan ahead. Some publishers routinely grant permission over the phone.

#### **7. What about photocopies or recordings that are already in our church?**

Destroy unauthorized photocopies and recordings, and replace them with legal editions. Possession of any illegal copies is the same as harboring stolen goods.

#### **8. Are we permitted by law to perform copyrighted religious works in Church?**

Yes. Law permits you to perform copyrighted religious works from legal editions in the course of services at places of worship or in religious assemblies. Legal editions do not result from unauthorized duplication of religious works. Purchasing one copy of sheet music, then making 30 copies for the choir without permission is not legal or ethical.

#### **9. Can I make an original recording of a copyrighted song?**

Yes, but you must secure a recording license (also known as a mechanical license) from the copyright owner and pay a specific royalty per song, per recording.

#### **10. Can I make a recording using a prerecorded instrumental accompaniment track?**

You may do so provided you have proper permission. Two different permissions are necessary in this situation. The **first** from the copyright owner of the selection to be recorded, and the **second** from the producer/manufacturer of the accompaniment track. Most often, owners require permission fees for their work.

#### **11. Must I get permission to make copies of copyrighted music?**

The following activities require permission from the owner prior to any such use or means of duplication:

- Print songbooks or song sheets containing copyrighted works for use in churches, Bible studies, or prayer groups, as long as they are not sold.
- Make a photocopy of a copyrighted work for an accompanist in order to sing a solo
- Make videos of worship services or special musical presentations such as those for holidays, for youth or for children
- Make a MIDI or another kind of electronic reproduction
- Make a recording or video available through the Internet, on a website or by any other kind of electronic medium

#### **12. Is there a source I can contact to obtain permission to use many assembly-sung compositions?**

Some publishers and songwriters license their own compositions. Others combine with a licensing agent that offers blanket permits for assembly use at a fee that is usually annual. One such agent is New Dawn Music, PO Box 13248, Portland OR 97213-0248. New Dawn licenses all music copyrighted by:

*OCP Publications*  
*New Dawn Music*  
*North American Liturgy Resources (N.A.L.R.)*  
*St. Thomas More Group, England*  
*TEAM Publications*  
*St. Meinrad Archabbey*  
*Gooi en Sticht, Baarn, The Netherlands*

*ISEDET, Buenos Aires. Argentina*  
*San Pablo Internacional, S.S.P. Madrid, Spain*  
*Ediciones Musical Pax, Madrid, Spain*  
*Editorial Apostolado de la Prensa, Madrid, Spain*  
*Ediciones Musica-Liturgia y Oracion, Pamplona, Spain*

Note that **this license is for assembly sung music only**. The license does not give the right to photocopy or duplicate any choral or instrumental sheet music, accompaniments, arrangements for keyboards, handbells or other instruments, choral songbooks or other ensemble works.

**13. What if I cannot find the owner of a copyrighted song? Can I go ahead and use it without permission?**

No. Check the copyright notice on the work or contact the publisher of the collection in which the work appears. Once you know the name, write, or call the copyright owner. If you need assistance locating the address or phone number, call New Dawn Music, 800-2433296, or write Music Publishers' Association, 711 Third Avenue, New York NY 10017.

**14. What about out-of-print items?**

Most publishers are agreeable, under special circumstances, to allow reprinting of out-of-print items. However, you must get permission from the copyright owner prior to any duplication.

**15. What is public domain"?**

If a song is in the public domain, the copyright protection for the song has expired, and the song is dedicated to the public for use as it sees fit with no permission required from anyone. The absence of a copyright notice (see question 1) is one indication that a song may be in the public domain

**16. What is "fair use"?**

Fair use is not generally available to churches. Fair use is established by statute and interpreted by the court.

It permits the user to legally reproduce portions of copyrighted works for criticism, comment, news reporting, classroom teaching, scholarship, and research.

In no instance does this apply to a performance. The various interest groups involved have agreed upon guidelines that constitute the minimum and not the maximum standards of educational fair use. If you are interested in a copy of these guidelines, please contact The Copyright Office (address above). the publishers of the music. They will inform you of their requirements concerning your request.

**17. Is it permissible to make duplicates of the recording that accompanies a musical or printed work to use for "learning" or "rehearsal" purposes?**

No. It is illegal. As good as this idea is, and as helpful as it would be to teach the music to members of the choir, such duplication without permission is against the law. Write or call the publishers of the music. They will inform you of their requirements concerning your request.

**18. If I buy a recording, is it permissible to make a copy for a friend?**

Duplication of copyrighted materials is against the law when the purpose avoids a legal purchase.

**19. What are the penalties for making unauthorized copies of copyrighted music?**

The law provides for the owner of a copyright to recover damages for unauthorized use of copyrighted music. These damages include profit the user may have made and statutory damages ranging from not less than \$500 to not more than \$100,000 per infringement. In addition, prison terms are provided for willful (deliberate, with knowledge that it is wrong) and commercial infringement. This includes people in churches, schools, and not-for-profit organizations.

**20. What about photocopiers who are not caught?**

Professional musicians in most schools and churches know the reasons for the law. By complying with the copyright laws, they protect the salaries their fellow musicians collect from their copyright materials. Such action forces the price of legal editions higher. Perpetrators risk dishonor from professional colleagues who understand the law. They risk fines and jail sentences if taken to court.

#### **SUMMARY**

Plainly stated, making unauthorized copies of copyrighted material is strictly illegal. However, music publishers want their songs used as much as possible, so in many cases, they will grant permission. Contact the copyright owner prior to use or duplication.

Music Publishers' Association, OCP Publications, and New Dawn Music prepared these guidelines. We claim no copyright on these guidelines. Please reproduce this outline among your friends!