

Churches and Music Copyright Law

By Todd Lowry, atty. Music Ministry Team

One of the most vexing problems facing church music directors and music ministers is complying with and simply understanding the Copyright Law.

What is it that I legally can and cannot do? Am I violating copyright law by photocopying lyrics for congregational use or by projecting lyrics on a screen during the church service? Do I want to take a chance? What happens if I get caught doing something wrong?

Such questions have plagued music directors and caused many a headache for years.

With regard to performing music, there is a religious service exemption in the Copyright Law. Thus, churches are free to perform any music they want during the course of a service without having to obtain a license (i.e. permission) or paying a performance royalty or license fee.

However, in general, photocopying copyrighted music or lyrics, printing the music or lyrics in a church bulletin, projecting the music or lyrics on a screen, including them on a sound recording or a video of a service, telecasting or pod casting the music—all such uses would constitute copyright infringement without prior permission and the likely payment of a license fee. Some uses even require multiple licenses.

However, this problem has finally been solved, at least with regard to New Thought churches, by emPower Music Rights, a licensing service created by emPower Music & Arts.

For the simple payment of an annual license fee, churches are given a blanket license to use any song from emPower's administrative catalog for any of the uses mentioned above. The catalog includes the entire song output of nearly every major New Thought songwriter, including Rickie Byars Beckwith, Karen Drucker, Daniel Nahmod, David Roth, Faith Rivera, Karen Taylor Good, Robert Anderson (Devotion), Richard Mekdeci, Sue Riley, Chris Foster and others. The songwriters are compensated out of the license fees.

The license fees are reasonable and are set according to the size of your congregation.

If you are a music director, I suggest that you go to www.empowerma.com/musicrights for information. I'm sure you'll want to sign up.



Also, if you are a New Thought songwriter and your music is played in churches, go to the same website to see how you can get your music included in the catalog.

Music copyright issues will never go away, but this is a major step in getting churches in compliance with the Copyright Law and in compensating songwriters for the use of their music.



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