



Writing Songs for your Church

This Fact File has been created by CCLI as a guide to the copyright implications for anyone writing songs for use in their church. If you do not find all the information you need here, please visit uk.ccli.com/churches or contact CCLI (details overleaf).

How do I protect my work?

In the UK, a newly written song is protected from the moment it is written down or recorded in some physical or tangible format. Since copyright is automatic you do not need to register your work. However, songwriters are generally advised to make appropriate provisions in case it ever becomes necessary to prove ownership of a song.

Most commonly, this is done by sending a copy of the song to yourself by recorded-delivery post, enabling you to prove that you had the song on a particular date; of course, the envelope must remain sealed until such time as proof of ownership is demanded. Please note, this method does not prove you wrote the song, it simply establishes that you were in possession of it on a particular date.

Alternatively, you could keep a copy with your bank or solicitor, or there are companies who will register your songs. However, you may incur additional costs with these options.

Non-proprietary data

Non-proprietary data is the information which identifies the author and owner of a song.

Always ensure the correct copyright information appears on your music, demos, lyric sheets, CDs, etc. The usual format is:

Copyright symbol & Date Author/Composer Publisher/Catalogue

For example: © 2009 Jennie Wren, Dawn Chorus Music

How long does copyright protection last?

Copyright in a song consists of two elements; there is a literary work (words) and a musical work (melody). These copyrights expire 70 years after the end of the calendar year in which the author/composer dies. After the 70 years have expired the song becomes Public Domain (PD).

Author and Composer are the same person	The song will become PD 70 years after death.
Author and Composer are different people	The words and music are likely to become PD at different times unless they both die in the same year.

Once a song is PD you can freely reproduce the words and music without further permission being required, unless you intend to photocopy it from a publication which is still in copyright (See the *Photocopying Fact File*). However, always check that the entire song is PD if there is a separate author and composer.

Your rights in your song

As the author/composer and copyright owner of a new song, you have the freedom to copy, perform, distribute, broadcast, adapt or arrange your own work. This means you can use it in your church without reference to anyone else. However, this may not be the case if you choose to sign any of your rights to a third-party organisation, for example a publisher. You may need to discuss the detail of any such agreement with them.

If your song is used by another person without your permission then it is possible that they have infringed your copyright. As the copyright owner you may make a claim against the user for any loss of income, should you feel that your moral or economic rights have been infringed by your work being reproduced or modified.

Publishing your song

If your songs have become popular in your own church and other churches are also singing them, you may wish to consider having them published. CCLI is not in a position to recommend any particular publisher to songwriters, but you can find contact details for a large selection of publishers in the Authorised Administrator's List on our website: churches.uk.ccli.com/resources/authorised.

Musical arrangements

To make a musical arrangement of someone else's song, you first need their permission to do so, unless the music is Public Domain (PD).

If your church has a Church Copyright Licence (CCL) available from CCLI, you can make customised instrumental arrangements of musical compositions covered by the licence, provided that no published version is available. All aspects of the music, apart from the instrumentation, must remain unchanged and the church must have purchased an original copy of the music.

What is copyright?

Copyright is an intellectual property right given to the creators of original musical, literary and dramatic works. The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (CDPA) is the legislation that currently operates in the UK and provides the creator with two main rights:

Economic

this allows the creator to charge anyone who wishes to copy, perform or record their work for any commercial or non-commercial use.

Moral

this allows the creator to protect their work from any change which might be considered offensive or not in keeping with their wishes.

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