

Copyright Trouble for Churches

Reprinted *(with permission)* from Insurance Board, Partners in Protection

www.insuranceBoard.org

700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland OH 44115

The following article is reprinted from Insurance Board's newsletter. It is used with permission from Insurance Board.

In a previous article in *The Steward*, we advised about a certain author of a popular poem often recited at funerals who aggressively enforces her copyright by making claims against unwitting churches who publish the poem on their websites. The claim amount is usually \$5,000 or more.

Since we continue to see claims from this author, we think it is important to specifically identify the poem and its author. Linda Ellis is the author of "The Dash." The poem was written and is owned by Ms. Ellis, who employs people to scour the internet to identify violations of her rightful copyright. [Her website](#) prominently contains a section on copyright and explicitly denies any right to publish her work. Linda Ellis is so aggressive in defense of her copyright that her tactics have been widely posted on the internet. A little Google search will reveal the story.

Remember, churches have a very limited copyright exemption. For the most part, a work can only be recited during a live religious service. Churches can find themselves in trouble when they post a video of the sermon. Another way churches find themselves in trouble is with songs. While it is generally ok to sing a copyrighted song during a sermon, it is NOT ok to put the lyrics in a handout. Churches are not immune to copyright laws, and yes, people will sue a church. It is your responsibility to know the laws if you are going to use someone else's material. If in doubt, do the research, contact an attorney, and ask before you use.

Anything that has been created by another person or organization and exists in writing is copyrighted. For example, this content that Insurance Board is presenting is copyrighted. You must get permission if you wish to share or reprint copyrighted information.



For more information, contact Nellie Howard at the Resource Center,

resourcenter@wvpresbytery.org