

Basic Copyright Guide For Churches

(with an emphasis on streaming)

USING MUSIC IN WORSHIP SERVICES

To use (copy lyrics and/or music, project, arrange) music in a religious/church setting, you need to get a license. CCLI is the best and only practical option for churches in the evangelical protestant Church community. Their base license and other services can reviewed here:

<https://us.ccli.com/copyright-license/>

The only case in which churches would NOT need a license from CCLI to use music in a service is if they are exclusively singing from legitimately purchased copies of the music (like hymnals or worship songbooks). About 25%–30% of churches use hymnals actively, but few use them exclusively. You also would NOT need a license if you simply sang songs but didn't project the lyrics and/or music or copy them for the worship team. Simply "performing" a religious song in a religious service does not require a license as it is subject to the religious services exemption in the copyright law.

STREAMING COPYRIGHTED SONGS

While a live performance of a worship song without copying or projection is exempt, broadcasting the songs via the internet is not exempt from licensing and requires permission.

When you are listening to a piece of recorded music, you are hearing two types of copyrighted materials. The audio recording (digital single, album) and the underlying song (melody and lyrics). Most churches are webcasting their own performances (i.e, church-owned audio recordings); therefore, they would only need a license for the underlying song (melody and lyrics). If you are using prerecorded tracks from a known worship artist, you would need permission to webcast these as well. Thankfully, many services like MultiTracks.com and WorshipHouseMedia.com (which sell video worship tracks/lyric videos to many churches) offer streaming licensing options, or they are included in the purchase of the pre-recorded tracks.

You need a license to broadcast copyrighted songs via a church website or any other internet platform. There are two good solutions.

1. WorshipCast License: See the link below. This is an a la carte license and doesn't require a CCLI license. However, I can't imagine churches having this license without a CCLI license if they are using contemporary worship songs in their service as described above.

<https://christiancopyrightsolutions.com/services/worshipcast/>

The above link gives a great overview of the license, what it covers, and what it costs (by church size).

WorshipCast covers everything in ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC's catalog, which is virtually every popular song in the world. It is a more comprehensive license that would cover "secular" Christmas standards and the rare case where a secular/mainstream song is used by a church to illustrate a point or theme in a pastor's sermon.

2. CCLI Streaming/Podcast License: CCLI has a streaming/podcast license that provides the same service but only for Christian Music/Worship songs. You must be a CCLI general license holder, and then you can "add on" the streaming podcast license. For a small church, the various fees and licenses are reasonable and offer great flexibility.

<https://us.ccli.com/copyright-license/>

The above link gives the various licenses they offer, what they cover, and what they cost.

CCLI recently started managing WorshipCast, but the licenses are still being offered separately.

IMPORTANT NOTE: WorshipCast and CCLI Streaming licenses cover streaming from a church's own website and not social media platforms.

STREAMING MUSIC ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Neither the CCLI Streaming or WorshipCast license covers uploading or copying copyrighted music on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc. It is advisable to only use songs or recordings you own. If you want to use popular songs or recordings, you should create playlists of popular worship videos for songs already on YouTube and share those with your congregation alongside your pre-recorded messages or teaching/preaching videos. The approved, licensed, or authorized recordings should be easily found on these social media platforms.