

# Writing Songs for your Church

## COPYRIGHT FACT FILE

This FACT FILE has been created by Christian Copyright Licensing International (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 in this FACT FILE, please visit [www.ccli.co.uk](http://www.ccli.co.uk) or contact CCLI (details overleaf).

### COPYRIGHT AND THE LAW

Copyright is an intellectual property right given to the creators of original musical, literary and dramatic works. The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 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.

### PROTECTING YOUR 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 expires 70 years after the end of the calendar year in which the last surviving author dies. A song which is no longer protected by copyright is described as being Public Domain (PD).

Where words and music have been written separately, it is probable that independent copyright exists in the words and in the music. This means the words will become PD 70 years from the end of the calendar year in which the author of the words dies, and the music will become PD 70 years from the end of the calendar year in which the music composer dies.

*Continued overleaf...*

**For more information visit [www.ccli.co.uk](http://www.ccli.co.uk)**

## HOW LONG DOES COPYRIGHT PROTECTION LAST? *continued...*

Once a song is PD, it may be freely adapted, arranged and translated. Where significant changes have been made to the original song, the adaptor of the PD song may claim a new copyright in that adaptation. Always check that both the words and the music of the song you wish to use are PD, and that neither the words nor the music are an adaptation/arrangement of a PD song in which the adaptor claims a new copyright.

A separate typography right exists in publications (such as hymnbooks) which lasts 25 years from the date the edition was first published. This means you cannot photocopy any songs (including PD songs) from the songbook without the relevant permission.

To photocopy a song from a hymnbook, you need to check that copyright in the words, the music and the typography have expired, or that you have permission to reproduce those parts which are still in copyright.

## 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 perhaps 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 ([www.ccli.co.uk/resources/publishers-producers.cfm](http://www.ccli.co.uk/resources/publishers-producers.cfm)).

## MUSICAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

If your church has the Music Reproduction Licence (MRL) 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.

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*This FACT FILE has been produced to offer guidance and advice to songwriters. It does not claim to be a full description of copyright law, and CCLI cannot accept any responsibility for any errors or omissions in the information provided.*

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