Learn Simple Steps To Keep Your Church Super Bowl Party Legal

by CCS



While the media-inflated "Deflate Gate" dominates this year's Super Bowl buzz, church leaders are once again preparing for one of America's most sacred national holidays... Super Bowl Sunday. Super Bowl XLIX returns to the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, AZ this Sunday, February 1, where the New England Patriots (no more deflation, please) will face off against the Seattle Seahawks.

Churches host viewing parties as a family friendly and dynamic evangelistic opportunity to reach out to their community, but what about copyright issues and potential

infringement problems? The good news is that, churches can host Super Bowl parties without fear of penalties and interference from the NFL for copyright infringement...**IF** they stay within certain boundaries.

CCS recently had a chance to speak with an NFL representative regarding the NFL's policies for churches that want to host viewing parties on February 1.

CCS: Many Churches enjoy gathering together to watch the Super Bowl each year, but they are unsure about necessary steps they must take in order to stay copyright compliant when doing so. What requirements must a church meet in order to host a "viewing party?"

NFL: If a church holds a "viewing party" in its usual place of worship and does not charge a fee for attending such viewing party, the NFL will not object when a church has a party for its congregants to watch the Super Bowl together.

A key point in the NFL's response to churches is its allowance of a viewing party in its "usual place of worship." This is an important qualification to understand. We understand that many churches do not have a typical church campus and many use rented public spaces to conduct worship services. Here is the NFL's position on these situations.

CCS: Many churches that hold regular services meet in rented spaces (i.e. convention centers, hotel conference centers, movie theaters, and school auditoriums). Does your previously mentioned statement regarding "usual place of worship" also apply to churches in these situations?

NFL: No, the NFL's grant of permission is with respect to the church property (not rented spaces).

CCS: We also understand that it is important for churches not to use registered trademarks of the NFL in any promotional materials, including via social media or their website concerning the viewing party. How can NFL trademarks be properly licensed for use?

NFL: If a church is only using NFL marks and no logos to describe the party in materials distributed to its congregants, the NFL will not object. For example, you can refer to the party as the Super Bowl party and you can refer to the two teams participating (i.e., this year's Seattle Seahawks vs. the New England Patriots"), but a church cannot use the NFL Shield, Super Bowl or Club logos.

CCS: What is the NFL's policies regarding showing regular season games and playoff games during the season? Does your policy only apply to the Super Bowl?

NFL: it would be fine for churches to follow the same guidelines throughout the season if they want to watch regular season games at their church.

Churches face many other questions about copyright issues and licensing. Call 1-855-5SOLVER (576-5837) to speak with a copyright solver for free information on music licensing solutions.

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There are some important rules to follow to avoid being tackled with risks of copyright infringement:

1. Churches must show the game live on equipment they use in the course of ministry at their premises.

2. Churches cannot charge admission for the party. The NFL has stated, however, that churches may take up a donation to defray the cost of the event.

3. Churches must not use NFL Shield, Super Bowl or Club logos to promote your party.

The NFL has the right to put restrictions on how churches and other establishments may show the game because the broadcast, like all televised programs, are protected by Copyright Law. The U.S. Copyright Act specifically restricts public establishments from transmitting broadcasts on TV screens larger than 55" without paying license fees to the copyright owner, in this case the NFL owns the rights to showing the live TV broadcast of the game. However, the NFL policy allows churches to use whatever equipment, including screens, that they use at their facilities on a regular basis. Note that because the NFL's "agreement" to allow church viewing parties was not made into law, the NFL could change its mind on enforcement of the restrictions at any time, but they have consistently lifted some of the restrictions for churches, as stated in their official response to CCS's questions above.

The Super Bowl has the largest economic impact of any regular human event with literally every demographic engaged in this annual national fervor. While churches don't try to make money on The Big Game, they often promote events to view the classic clash as a great chance to engage in "friendship" evangelism.

Also, because the Super Bowl name is a registered trademark of the NFL, commercial advertisers are strictly prohibited from using the name in any way without an official license.

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