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SYNOPSIS

***note:** the information included in this micro-course is not legal advice. This article is meant for research and resource purposes only. If you have serious questions about the law, consult an attorney.



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Micro-course: "7 essential questions about music, copyright and the church"

with Brock Shinen

After several years of working in church music and worship resources, I have become intimately acquainted with legal contracts, music licensing and copyright documents. Whenever I need detailed expert advice from a legal professional who knows music and copyright law, Brock Shinen is the person I talk to. His legal acumen is accompanied with a strong understanding of the local church and the use of music in worship. In this micro-course I ask Brock seven essential questions related to the church, music and copyrights. I trust it will be helpful.



-Kim Gentes

1 Is Church Music Protected by Copyright Law?

Yes, all forms of music are protected by US copyright laws. This includes forms such as printed/sheet music, recorded music, performance of the music and more. The main point of this is that copyright protection means you must get permission from the copyright owner to use music in any form.

2 Can I Copy Songs for Church Use?

Only with permission. If you are a church and you wish to duplicate or copy a song in any form, you must obtain permission from the copyright owner to do any such activity. Permission is not implied and must be granted.

3 Can I Legally Perform Songs In Church?

The copyright owner has the exclusive right to control *public* performances of the copyrighted work. Performing music of a copyrighted work in a *public* setting requires permission by the owner or an exemption granted in copyright law. *Private* performances of copyrighted works do not require permission of the copyright owner.

4 Can I Use Songs In Multimedia in Church?

Permission is required. Use of a song (copyrighted work) in any media form (Eg. DVD, website, YouTube) may infringe on other rights held by the copyright owner. Even if you have permission to perform a song, you will need to acquire permissions to use a recording of such a performance in any of those media forms.

5 What does "Religious Exemption" Cover?

The *performance* of music in the course of services at the place of worship is an activity that is generally covered by an exemption granted in the copyright law. The *display* of a copyrighted work (song) is also included in this "religious exemption." However, these exempted activities do not grant permission for other activities, such as recording or lyric duplication. What this means is that you cannot legally perform these other activities (copying lyrics, for example) in order to perform an exempted activity.

6 How Does CCLI apply?

It's a common misconception that a CCLI license allows a church to do any copyrighted activity regarding music. Not every activity is covered by a CCLI license. Do not assume your activity is covered. Contact CCLI about your specific activity.

7 What about Worship Planning Websites?

Copyright permissions are not inherent in most worship planning software/websites. Simply because a worship planner may enable you to perform activities with songs does not necessarily mean that the activity is legal for you to perform. Be sure to find out if your worship planning system is licensed to perform copyrighted activities such as copying, sharing, or printing of songs.