Answering the question: Is it against the law to copy or project works from *The Book of Praise* and *The book of Psalms*?

by Grace-ann McIntyre

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**Answering the question:**

Is it against the law to copy or project works from *The Book of Praise* and *The Book of Psalms*?

Staff at The Vine in The Presbyterian Church in Canada have been asked by several congregations if it would be possible to produce electronic versions of *The Book of Praise* and *The Book of Psalms*. An electronic version would make it possible to project hymns and Psalms on screen in the sanctuary or copy them for bulletin inserts.

We looked into the possibility of producing electronic versions, and discovered that it would be far more expensive for congregations than the current book. The costs of the project would be huge, in terms of contacting and negotiating additional fees and agreements with every copyright holder, in ongoing fees, and in administrative costs.

Churches would have to buy a license for every congregant. It is much less expensive for a congregation to use a licensing service to reproduce copyrighted material.

**Copyright**

Copyright refers to the legal right to make printed copies of words or music. When material is under copyright, you must get permission from its creator in order to use it. It also means that the creator has the right to be paid for its use.

This helps to ensure that authors are paid for the use of their works of art, literature, criticism, or music. It also helps the author to control the conditions under which the work is reproduced. The owner of the copyright (the author or the entity to which the author has assigned the copyright) may go to court to seek damages if a work is copied without permission.

The author or composer also retains a moral right to prevent, for example, a work from being defaced, abridged, simplified or modified even if the copyright has been sold. The author or composer can seek damages for misuse of the work.

Even if you purchased both *The Book of Praise* and *The Book of Psalms*, you must obtain permission from the copyright holder to project or copy the lyrics or music for your congregation.

**Getting permission to copy or project material**

There are a number of companies that provide blanket permission for some - but not all - hymns and songs in our *Book of Praise*. The clearing houses listed below, however, state that they don’t provide lists of the music they cover because there are too many titles. Churches that currently project or copy lyrics or music on a regular basis usually find that they need licenses from three clearing houses - usually the first three clearing houses listed below. They also must contact the copyright holders for hymns which are not covered by a clearing house.

**Copyright Clearing Houses**

**How copyright clearing houses work**

Clearing houses may have different regulations, so it is important to read your agreement carefully. Some require the licensee to report on a periodic basis what items they actually used. Some ask for weekly reports that are submitted on a quarterly or other basis. Some allow you to log into a website.

**The cost of a license**

License costs generally depend on the size of a congregation. Most companies provide an annual fee. Churches that use these companies find that this annual fee is not much more expensive than obtaining permission to use one or two pieces for a few weeks. You pay in advance for your subscription, which expires after a set time, or you can pay for the single use of an item, also in advance.
These are some of the main copyright clearing houses:

- Licensingonline.org
  www.woodlakebooks.com; 800-663-2775
- Onelicense.net
  www.onelicense.net; 800-ONE-1501
- CCLI-Christian Copyright Licensing International
  www.ccli.com; 800-234-2446

In addition, major publishers such as GIA Publications and Hope Publishing Company offer easy access to non-commercial reprint permission. GIA Publications has programs for non-commercial use of much of the material under its control, for example, the hymns of John Bell and the Iona Community; and songs of the Taizé Community in France. With a few exceptions, a fee will apply.

- GIA
  phone 1-800-442-1358 or 708- 496-3800
  fax: 708- 496-3828
  email: reprints@giamusic.com.
- Hope Publishing
  phone: 1-800-323-1049
  fax: 708-665-2552
  email: hope@hopepublishing.com for information on reprinting items under their control.

**BOOK OF PRAISE (1997) HYMNS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

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