



Music Copyright in Online Worship Services

Frequently Asked Questions

Now that many congregations are offering online worship, leaders are asking questions about copyright for music used during live streamed or pre-recorded services. This resource offers advice about best practices; the answers provided, however, do not constitute legal advice as copyright law is complex, and it is difficult to address the many issues related to the use of music in online worship. It is the responsibility of those leading online worship to ensure that copyright law is not being violated.

Music Copyright License

Do we need a special copyright license to live stream the music portion of worship?

Yes. Fortunately, copyright clearing houses have live streaming licensing options.

Two that are commonly used by Canadian churches are:

- [CCLI](#)
- [One License](#)

What about pre-recorded video or audio content that is being distributed for congregational use online (i.e., pre-recorded worship services that contain music)?*

Yes, you also need a copyright license to post pre-recorded worship services if they contain music. If you purchased a “Podcast/Streaming License” from a copyright clearing house, the word “podcast” normally refers to any pre-recorded video or audio content being distributed for congregational use. The Podcast/Streaming License usually permits both pre-recorded and live streamed content, which means that content may be posted to your church’s website as well as on YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, Vimeo, Instagram, and other Internet-based platforms. Be sure to check the terms of the license you have purchased to confirm that your live streaming license also covers pre-recorded content.

**This answer is adapted from the One License website.*

How do I know what types of broadcasts or recordings are allowed with live streaming licenses?

Copyright clearing houses have different terms and regulations, so it is important that you read the terms of the licensing agreement carefully. There are certain activities that are “permitted” under the license (e.g., live streamed songs performed in your church services in audio and/or video format) and others that are “not permitted” (e.g., artist or record label recordings of songs). It is your responsibility to ensure that you are adhering to the terms set out in the license you have purchased. When in doubt, contact



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

customer service at your license provider directly to ensure that how you are using music in your online services is permitted.

Do we need a live streaming license if we are leading worship over Zoom or another online meeting platform but not recording or posting it elsewhere afterwards?

If you are using copyrighted music, yes you do. An active streaming license is required to “digitally transmit” copyrighted music from your church’s website, a hosted website or a streaming platform.

Will this license permit our church to play artist or record label recordings of hymns or praise music?

No. This license would permit the musicians, choirs and bands at your church to perform and pre-record copyrighted material that is covered by the license for congregational use. It would not permit your congregation to stream artist or record label recordings of songs. For example, the license may give your worship band permission to live stream or record a performance of the song “10,000 Reasons,” but it does not permit you to play the original recording of “10,000 Reasons” sung by Matt Redman.

If you would like to stream artist or record label recordings of songs, you will need to seek out copyright permissions from the copyright owner directly.

What about YouTube videos of music? Can we show those during a live streamed or pre-recorded service with this license?*

Because so many videos are uploaded to YouTube without permission from the copyright holders, it is generally recommended that churches do not play music videos on YouTube during online worship. If you do choose to use a YouTube video during worship, be sure that it is on an official YouTube channel and you have permission from the copyright owner.

Music videos that show the song lyrics you can sing along to are increasingly common on YouTube. Often, such videos are uploaded to YouTube and then embedded on the publisher’s website with details of how they permit it to be used. If the description of the video on the publisher’s website or YouTube channel indicates that they intend it to be used in a church service, then this would constitute consent. However, if there is any doubt, contact the publisher or copyright owner for permission before showing the video.

**This answer is adapted from the One License website.*



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Book of Praise Copyright

Are we allowed to stream or record songs from the Book of Praise for online worship?

If you are a Presbyterian Church in Canada congregation and already own copies of the Book of Praise:

- The hymns that are listed in the Book of Praise as being in the **public domain** can be streamed or recorded for the purpose of online worship. A list of the hymns from the Book of Praise that are in the public domain can be found on The Presbyterian Church in Canada [Worship web page](#).
- The hymns that list **The Presbyterian Church in Canada** as the copyright holder can also be streamed or recorded for worship purposes.

For hymns not in the public domain that have copyright holders other than The Presbyterian Church in Canada, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders. You can find copyright holder information at the back of the Book of Praise.

Are hymns from the Book of Praise covered by copyright clearing house licenses?

There are several companies that provide blanket permission for some—but not all—hymns and songs in the Book of Praise. Most copyright clearing houses have a search function on their website, where you can look up the hymns you are interested in using to see if they are covered by copyright license.

As aforementioned, you need a Podcast/Live Streaming copyright license to live stream or post recordings of hymns/worship music online.

Why doesn't the PCC make a digital version of the Book of Praise that contains the necessary copyright permissions for online use?

The Presbyterian Church in Canada looked into the possibility of producing an electronic version 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 negotiating additional fees and agreements with every copyright holder, ongoing fees, and 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.

What happens if the hymn from the Book of Praise that we want to use is not in the public domain, owned by the PCC, or covered by our copyright license?

You can attempt to track down the copyright holder yourself and ask if they will grant (in writing) permission for you to use the song for the purpose of online worship. This can be an onerous task, so it may be best to choose a hymn that *is* in the public domain,



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

whose copyright is owned by the PCC, or is covered by the copyright license you've purchased.

Additional Questions?

Who should we contact if we have a question about copyright and the Book of Praise?

If your question has not been answered in this resource, please visit the following two web pages on the PCC website:

- [Worship web page to view the document: "Legality of Copying the Book of Praise"](#)
- [Copyright Information web page](#)

If you cannot find the answer on one of these web pages, please email:

canadianministries@presbyterian.ca.

Who should we contact if we have questions about copyright and music in general (i.e., using hymns and worship songs that are not from the Book of Praise)?

Copyright is a legal matter. Questions are best addressed to professionals with an expertise in copyright or the copyright clearing house that your church is using. Here is the customer service information for the two most used copyright clearing houses in Canada.

- **CCLI Customer Service**
Website: ca.ccli.com/contact-ccli
Phone Number: 1-800-234-2446
- **One License**
Website: onelicense.net/contact
Phone Number: 1-800-ONE-1501