



Why Your Church Needs Performance Licenses



CHRISTIAN COPYRIGHT SOLUTIONS

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Overview

Copyright coverage in the church setting can be confusing. We get it. To simplify things, this guide focuses on just one type of copyright coverage, *performance licensing*. We've identified *six reasons churches and ministries need music performance rights licenses in the context of common church activities*. We'll then review two blanket performance licenses that give churches tremendous freedom to *play and perform music legally*.

Performance Rights Basics

Let's look at a few brief definitions to help lay the groundwork for understanding performance licensing:

Public Performance

Defined as occurring "in a place open to the public or at any place where a substantial number of persons outside of a normal circle of a family and its social acquaintances is gathered." Most church performances fit these criteria. A performance license grants permission to have these public performances, whether it is a live performance or playing of pre-recorded music, like an MP3 or a CD, or even a streaming service such as Spotify.

Performance Rights Organizations (PROs)

The three leading PROs in the United States; [ASCAP](#), [BMI](#), and [SESAC](#) control and manage music performance licenses. Every songwriter and publisher who wants to be paid performance royalties registers with one of the PROs, which together represent millions of songs. PROs collect performance license fees for a wide range of uses, from the Internet, radio, and TV broadcasts to stadiums, coffee shops, bowling alleys, and restaurants.

Religious Service Exemption (RSE)

Religious organizations qualify for an exemption under the [U.S. Copyright Law \(section 110\[3\]\)](#). Still, church leaders must understand which performances qualify and which do not. According to the exemption, the following performances are not copyright infringements:

"...performance of a non-dramatic literary or musical work or of a dramatico-musical work of a religious nature or display of a work, in the course of services at a place of worship or other religious assembly" shall not constitute infringement of copyright."

Now that we've laid the groundwork, let's investigate some reasons why churches need music performance licenses.

Reason #1

*Churches are **not** exempt from performance licensing.*

Many church leaders believe the exemption applies to all use of copyrighted music, regardless of the context. However, the RSE only applies to actual religious services. Outside of religious services, though, the exemption does not apply. A church has the same requirements as any business, restaurant, or stadium. This means for social events, outdoor concerts, fundraisers, children's music, Vacation Bible School, etc. you must have the proper licensing in place.

Reason #2

Churches play and perform music outside of their services.

Most churches and ministries, do in fact, use music outside of services. Maybe without even realizing it! Performance licensing covers the following activities:

- Before and after services
- On-site cafés and bookstores
- Concerts and retreats
- Picnics and barbecues
- Festivals and special music events
- Graduation and award ceremonies
- Vacation Bible School and youth groups
- Dance and exercise classes
- On-hold music
- Holiday and seasonal celebrations
- And more!

Reason #3

*Your CCLI license does **not** include performance licenses.*

The Church Copyright License by CCLI does not grant performance licenses. It grants a specific group of rights, primarily covering copying and derivatives for church congregational use. The Church Copyright license allows churches to do the following:

- Store lyrics and music on digital devices to enable the visual projection of songs
- Print songs
- Record services
- Make custom arrangements
- Translate songs

CCS and CCLI work together to provide the broadest comprehensive licensing available, making the use of copyrights simple, legal, and affordable, and ensuring churches and ministries are protected. And it's not an either-or situation; one license doesn't replace the other.

Reason #4

*The Religious Service Exemption does **NOT** allow you to broadcast or stream your church's performances.*

While the RSE allows churches to *play and perform* copyrighted music, the exemption only covers copyrighted works used in the context of a live, on-site worship service. The exemption does not extend to re-transmission or playback of the service via the Internet, TV, radio, or any other medium.

Reason #5

Performance licenses are affordable and simple to obtain.

Many church leaders are surprised to find out how simple and affordable it is to obtain performance licenses. CCS covers millions of Christian and secular songs across the catalogs of ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC.

The **[PERFORMmusic Onsite Facilities License](#)** provides churches and ministries within the US and its territories with a license for live performances and playing prerecorded music in their facilities, including satellite campuses.

The **[WORSHIPcast Online Streaming License](#)** allows churches and ministries to webcast or stream performances of copyrighted music on their websites.

Reason #6

Performance licenses give churches the freedom to play and perform music anywhere.

With annual performance licenses, like **PERFORMmusic** and **WORSHIPcast**, you can enhance all your church activities with music. The freedom to legally play or perform millions of Christian and secular songs on-site in your facilities and satellite campuses combined with the ability to take your church online can help you stay connected and engaged with your congregation.

Learn more about our licenses!

CCS provides blanket licenses that meet most church performance copyright needs. For more details or information about products and services that we offer contact:

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