

Copyright Requirements for Church Music

- presented by Cher & Gene Klosner for Light the Fire! Music -
www.LightTheFireMusic.com

Confused about copyright requirements for church music? Here is an explanation of what you are required to do with each song you use at church, whether it is from us or any other publisher. See the **flow chart** at the end demonstrating what is explained.

Public Domain

If a song is in the **public domain** (*generally*, one that is over 75 years old), use of the song requires no legal monetary responsibility for any use, either performing or reprinting. Make sure both the text AND melody are in the public domain, since many traditional songs have more modern lyrics added. For example, the traditional Irish song “Be Thou My Vision” is in the public domain, but the songs “Make Us True Servants” and “Lord of All Hopefulness” have more recent lyrics attached to that melody, therefore making those two latter compositions NOT in the public domain.

Note: An *arrangement* of a piece of out-of-copyright music is under copyright until 70 years after the arranger’s death, though the original tune or piece on which the arrangement was based remains out of copyright.

A couple examples of exceptions to the rule:

- 1) Our arrangement of “O Come O Come Emmanuel” is a *copyrighted arrangement* (by the Light the Fire! Music) of a *public domain* song; therefore, to use our arrangement (harmonies, piano score) requires purchase of the octavos from us, but to print the text and/or melody on a songsheet, etc., requires no permission.
- 2) Our *Mass For the Advent Season* is based on “O Come O Come Emmanuel” but incorporates the English translation of the Mass parts (“Holy,” Memorial Acclamations, etc.), which are actually under copyright by ICEL, with whom we have a publishing agreement, and their portion of what is earned goes to them from us. So, to use our arrangements of these pieces requires purchase of the octavos from us, and to print the melody and/or text on a songsheet, etc., requires a reprint license. *More on reprint licenses below.*

Copyrighted Songs

For songs that are not in the public domain, there are two main categories of financial responsibility:

- 1) the **purchase of octavos/sheet music** (choral/vocal arrangements, piano scores, guitar chords) for you and your choir, and
- 2) **supplying the text and melody to your congregation** (hymnals, overhead projections, songsheets, bulletin inserts etc.)

1) Your **purchase of octavos/sheet music** is yours to keep for life, but to MAKE copies of that sheet music without paying the publisher for each copy made is an infringement of copyright, which is illegal. Supplying your choir members with octavos/sheet music usually requires simply buying as many copies of it as there are choir members; therefore, if 30 members of your choir need the music, you buy 30 copies of the octavo. Generally, for church music, in these days of digital downloads, it is done on the honor system, where you download it once, but tell the seller (publisher) how many copies you will be making of it on your printer, and you pay the single amount times the number of copies, just as if you downloaded it that many times. This is an accepted practice and is often going to be the case for certain songs. (***Our exception to the rule:*** Light the Fire! Music grants you permission to make those copies *for your choir* with every purchase of our sheet music.) The purchase of any octavo does NOT, however, grant permission for printing lyrics or melody or any part of the song *for the congregation*.

2) There are multiple ways of **supplying the text and melody to your congregation**:

- a) **Purchasing hymnals/missals** – Some hymnals are designed and priced for **one year’s use** (Music Issue; Breaking Bread, etc.) or **seasonal use** (Missalettes, etc.) and need to be replaced (please recycle!) when they expire, if you choose to continue to use that company’s hymnal. Some are designed and priced for **permanent use** (Lead Me, Guide Me; Gather; JourneySongs, etc.) and may stay in your pews as long as they last. If the songs in these hymnals are all you need and you will not be reprinting lyrics and/or melody anywhere else (wedding/graduation programs, other special church/school events), then you have no further obligations.
- b) **Printing text (with or without melody) on songsheets/assembly cards/bulletins, etc. OR projecting text on overhead OR copying songs from the hymnals -** If there are songs you need that are beyond the scope of the hymnals (i.e., **songs from the Light the Fire! Music catalog**, Contemporary Christian music, songs from OCP and GIA that were not included in their hymnals, etc.) or you want to copy a song from your church/school’s hymnal, you will need to purchase a **reprint license. A reprint license grants the permission to reprint those songs.** *Again, remember a reprint license does NOT grant permission to print full music scores (octavos) for your choir or congregation, only text and melody for the congregation. (Our exception to the rule: Light the Fire! Music grants you permission to make octavo copies for your choir with every purchase of our sheet music. Also, a 1-year Light the Fire! Reprint License comes free with every Mass purchase.)*

NOTE: Songs outside the liturgical “market” (such as pop songs that have appropriate messages, i.e., “Jesus is Just Alright,” “Lean On Me,” songs from *Godspell*, etc.) require **permission from the individual publishers to reprint**. This is something we will be addressing separately in the future but not for the purposes of this guide.

More on Reprint Licenses

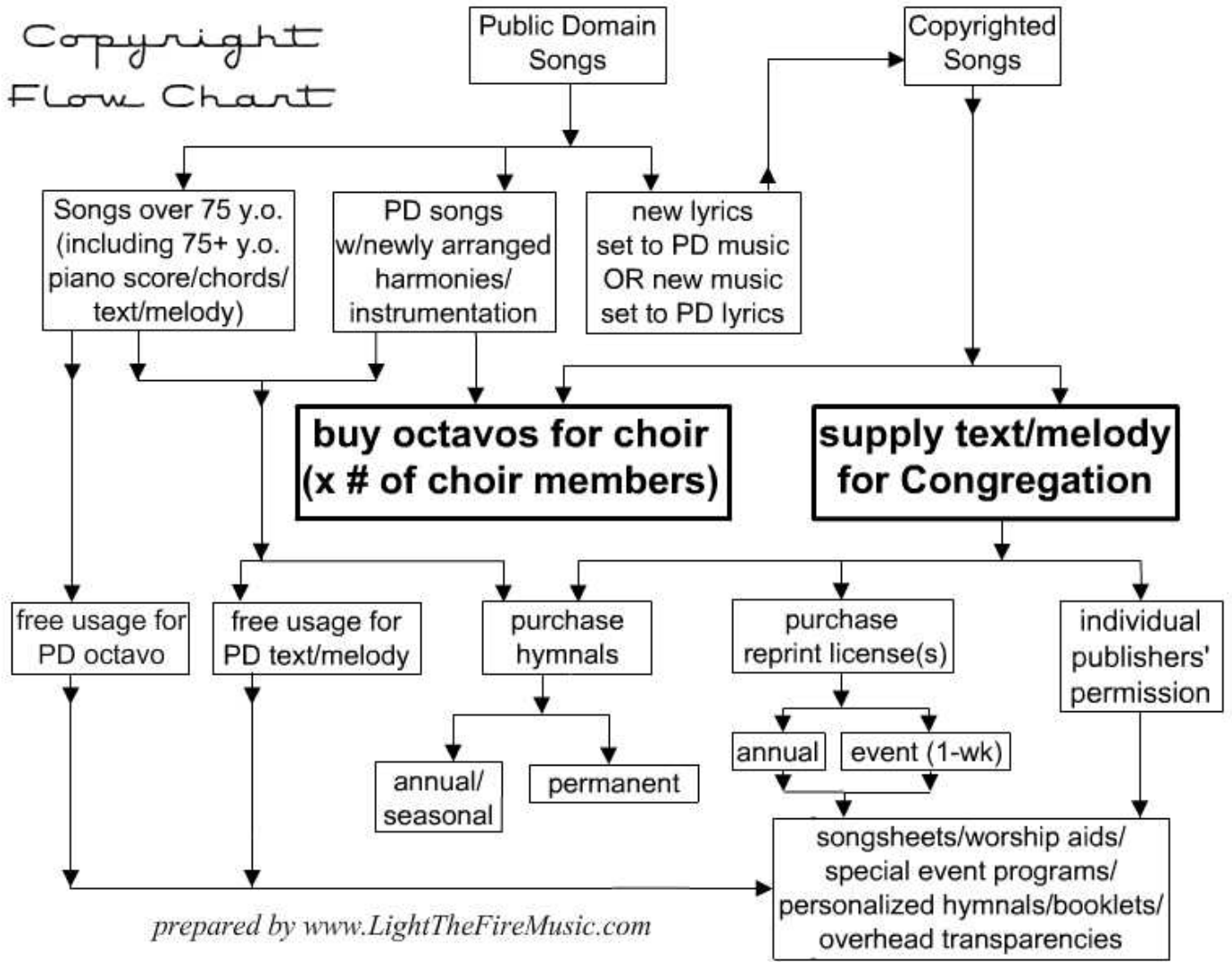
You already know what songs are in most hymnals, so here we will address reprint licenses. Often, churches will have hymnals AND one or more licenses. Reprint licenses allow churches access to literally thousands of songs, for a flat **blanket reprinting license**. And the great thing is, one license covers the church and school events at the church for a year (we recommend the annual license vs. per event license). All songs in the Light the Fire! Music catalog are covered by the new **Light the Fire! Reprint License**, which is free for a year with the purchase of any complete Light the Fire! Mass setting, and includes continuation of octavo reprinting and access to our tones pages.

The main three licenses being used in Catholic (and other liturgical?) churches are Christian Copyright Licensing, International (**CCLI**), **OneLicense.net**, and **LicenSingOnline.org**. Most songs that are in the Contemporary Christian Market are licensed under **CCLI**. This particular license is a must, if you have a youth ministry department or teen choir or band. GIA, Lorenz and many other publishers that have Catholic music in their catalogs are using **OneLicense.net**. OCP’s **LicenSingOnline.org** covers songs that are published by OCP, with some other publishers as well. All these can supplement or replace your hymnals, depending on your parish/school’s needs.

For more information comparing the church music sites and licenses, see the Church Music Comparison Chart, or visit our reprint license page: www.LightTheFireMusic.com/reprintlicense.htm.

Be sure to bring up the responsibility AND benefits of reprinting when addressing the needs for the music director’s annual budget, and discuss it with other departments, such as the school’s music department and even the campus ministry and alumni offices if you’re at a high school or college.

Copyright Flow Chart



prepared by www.LightTheFireMusic.com