

Moravian Music Foundation

Some Basic Facts about Copyright

1. The law says that anyone who writes or creates something (words, tune, work of art, computer program, etc., etc., etc.) automatically owns it, whether or not a copyright is registered with the U.S. Copyright Office.
2. Copyright law determines for how long the material is protected and when it moves into the “public domain” – usable by anyone. This law keeps changing (it’s a bit amusing to think that Mickey Mouse is the major “driver” in copyright law changes; sure enough, Disney does not want Mickey to become a public domain image!).
3. All works written more than 95 years ago are in the public domain (1924 and earlier, in 2020). Even if a work has a copyright, if the date is over 95 years, it is in the public domain. Copyright protection generally lasts for 70 years after the death of the author. If the work was a “work for hire”, then copyright persists for 120 years after creation or 95 years after publication, whichever is shorter.
4. If the work was written after 1923, you should assume it’s still protected by copyright; that means you may not photocopy, print the words in a bulletin, project the words, or record it, **or broadcast/livestream it**, without permission from the copyright holder.
5. For hymns and other worship songs, there are two major copyright administration companies that handle licenses (to print, project, or record) for most of the Christian publishing companies. These are: www.OneLicense.net – handles more “traditional” hymns and hymnals; and www.https://us.ccli.com – handles more “contemporary” songs.

With either of these you may purchase an annual license, which gives permission to use any and all of their covered songs for the year; an event license, which gives permission for a special event (like a synod or camp, multi-day, multi-worship service) or a single-use license. With each of these you are responsible to log on and report the songs you used – that’s how the copyright owners are paid royalties.

NOTE: For livestreaming, delayed broadcast, or recording, an add-on license is required. It is nominal and brings you in compliance. Contact the same companies and ask them what you need for what you will be sharing your worship experiences. Coverage is for “worship,” not for “concerts.”

6. Most of our Moravian composers and poets aren’t covered by either of these, and you have to seek individual permission to use. With *Sing to the Lord a New Song*, many of them have given their copyright over to the Interprovincial Board of Communication and the Moravian Music Foundation; as the book indicates, congregations may reproduce these for worship or educational purposes as long as you include the copyright notice given in the book (back of the title page).
7. Some other questions that often come up:
Can I make photocopies of sheet music that is out of print?
No, not without permission. (Yes, this IS a pain.)
I purchased the sheet music for a string quartet. Can I rearrange it for a trombone quartet? If the string quartet is protected by copyright, you may rearrange it for trombone quartet only with the permission of the copyright holder. Your trombone quartet arrangement would be considered a derivative work, and the holder of the copyright on the string quartet has the exclusive right to create a derivative work or to authorize someone else to create a derivative work.
8. For specific questions, please contact the Moravian Music Foundation (info@moravianmusic.org) and we’ll do our best to help.

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to do this right! It matters!

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