

Copyright, Worship & the Contemporary Church

Honoring Creators While Sharing the Gospel

Dr. Diana Sanchez-Bushong

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Designed for worship leaders, musicians, pastors, and tech teams, this practical workshop introduces the copyright issues most commonly encountered in contemporary worship. Participants will learn the differences among performing, copying, projecting, arranging, recording, sharing, and streaming music, and explore how licenses such as CCLI and ONE LICENSE apply to different church uses. The goal is to help churches develop copyright practices that both protect the congregation and honor artists' creative work.

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the basic rights protected by copyright and how they apply to church music.
2. Distinguish between performing music and copying, projecting, arranging, recording, distributing, and streaming it.
3. Understand the basic purposes and limitations of church licenses such as CCLI and ONE LICENSE.
4. Recognize common copyright mistakes made by contemporary worship ministries.
5. Develop simple practices for creating a copyright-healthy worship ministry.

OUTLINE

1. **Copyright 101: “We Bought It. Can We Use It?”**
 1. Interactive True/False copyright quiz
 2. Basic rights of creators and copyright holders
 3. Composition vs. sound recording
 4. The key question: *What are we doing with the song?*
2. **Understanding the Church Worship Exemption**
 1. Performing copyrighted music during in-person worship

2. Performance vs. copying and reproduction
3. Why the exemption does not automatically cover printing, projecting, recording, or streaming

3. What Does Our License Actually Cover?

1. CCLI Church Copyright License
2. Streaming and Streaming Plus
3. Rehearsal licensing
4. ONE LICENSE and broader hymn, liturgical, and choral repertoire

4. Contemporary Worship's Copyright Danger Zone

1. Downloading chord charts from the internet
2. Creating arrangements or changing lyrics
3. Using backing tracks, multitracks, and stems
4. Livestreaming and posting worship online
5. Playing commercial recordings and streaming services
6. Sharing rehearsal recordings and MP3s

5. "Can We Do This?" Small-Group Exercise

1. **GREEN:** Probably covered
2. **YELLOW:** Check the license
3. **RED:** Stop and get permission
4. Apply the categories to common worship-team scenarios

6. Seven Habits of a Copyright-Healthy Worship Ministry

1. Know which licenses the church owns
2. Check individual songs and uses
3. Use legitimate sources for charts and lyrics
4. Report song usage accurately
5. Treat streaming as a separate copyright question

6. Never assume nonprofit or church status equals permission
7. When unsure: **stop, check, and ask**
7. **Closing: Copyright as Christian Practice**
 1. Honor songwriters, composers, arrangers, musicians, and publishers
 2. Recognize creative work as a valuable ministry
 3. Remember the five verbs: **COPY • CHANGE • SHARE • RECORD • STREAM**