

Using Hymns at Your Event?

If your event includes singing hymns, you must ensure that your use of the hymns is fair and legal. If your group or event location has access to enough hymnals for each participant to have her own or share with those near her, you do not need to seek permission.

However, if you in any way reproduce a hymn or elements of it, you are required to seek permission from the copyright holder(s) of the hymn. Use of words and/or music in the following ways all constitute situations that obligate seeking permissions:

- photocopies
- inclusion in bulletin or worship aid and/or
- projection onto a screen.

There may be copyright for the music, words, harmony, arrangement and/or other components of the hymn.

How to tell if a hymn requires permission

In most hymnals, copyright information appears at the bottom of a hymn. There may be multiple copyrights for joint authorship of music or words, or separate copyright holders for words and music. You must seek permission from each entity listed. Some hymnals may list copyright holders

For example, in *The Presbyterian Hymnal** #515 “Now to Your Table Spread” has text copyrighted by Shirley Murray, music copyrighted by John Ireland Trust. You need to seek permission from both of these entities.

Some hymns will not list any copyright information; this is because the hymn is in public domain, and no permission is needed. For example, in *The Presbyterian Hymnal* #100, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” does not have any copyright information. You could photocopy this hymn using only the notation from the publisher noting where the copy came from.

How to find a copyright holder

Some hymnals (such as *Sing the Faith****) list acknowledgements and contact information for the copyright holders in an appendix within the hymnal. Some publishers maintain a list of copyright holders that they will send to you upon request. Other publishers, especially of large hymnals, do not maintain a file. If contact information is not listed within the hymnal, contact the publisher of the hymnal using the information found on their copyright page.

If the publisher does not offer a list, searching for the copyright holder through the Web is often an effective way of locating a copyright holder.

How to request permission

Most copyright holders will want to know details about how you plan to use the hymn, including:

- date of the event
- sponsoring group
- projected attendance
- way the hymn will be reproduced (in a bulletin or projection)
- any fees the sponsoring group will charge for the material that includes the hymn

Begin your permission requests as soon as possible; requests to large publishers may take as long as 4–6 weeks. Requests may need to be submitted in writing.

What to expect for fees

Copyright holders vary on what they charge for use; it can be anywhere from free to \$200. Most often the fee depends on the size of the event, with large events paying more. The fees the copyright holder charges compensate the lyricist or musician for his or her work and gifts that went into the hymn your group will enjoy.

**The Presbyterian Hymnal*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1990

***Sing the Faith*. Louisville, Ky.: Geneva, 2003