



Divine Worship and Copyright Law

Catholic social teaching
upholds the importance of intellectual property rights, including copyright,
as part of its broader support for the ownership of private property.

The Church teaches that the right to own private property
is a natural and fundamental human right.

In this context, copyright law can be viewed
as an extension of the 7th Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal,"
emphasizing the moral obligation to respect the creative works
and intellectual contributions of others.

The Office for Divine Worship wants to ensure that you are fully aware of the importance of copyright laws and how they apply to our religious practices and materials. We have prepared this document to serve as a comprehensive and easy-to-follow guide, aimed at enhancing your awareness and understanding of these laws. Our goal is to help you navigate the complexities of copyright regulations with confidence and clarity. Should you have any questions or require further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are here to support you in all matters related to copyright compliance.

The Reverend Matthew J. Kujawinski, Director
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"Many published works are protected by national and international copyright laws, which are intended to ensure that composers, text writers, publishers, and their employees receive a fair return for their work. Churches and other institutions have a legal and moral obligation to seek proper permissions and to pay for reprinting of published works when required, even if copies are intended only for the use of the congregation."

(no. 105, Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, © 2007, USCCB)

The guidance from our U.S. Bishops is relevant not only to the reprinting of copyrighted works in worship aids, but also extends to their use in livestreaming, podcasting, and displaying on screens.

The legal aspect of copyright:

Copyright legally protects creative works, making them the exclusive property of their creators, publishers, or managers. Users must obtain permission to use these materials, as unauthorized use is illegal.

"What are the possible financial penalties for violating copyright law?"

U.S. copyright law provides for the owner of copyright to recover damages ranging from \$500 to \$100,000 per copyright infringed. If willful infringement for commercial advantage and private financial gain is proven, criminal fines up to \$250,000 and/or five years imprisonment may apply.

The moral aspect of copyright:

Composers, arrangers, and publishers depend on royalties from their creative works. Without these funds, their ability to produce future resources is hindered. Requiring permission for use ensures funds go to the rightful owners. Depriving them of these funds is immoral.

"In the liturgy of the Church, what elements are copyrighted?"

- Musical compositions which are not in the public domain.
- Scriptural texts from the Lectionary for Mass.
- Texts and musical compositions contained in the Roman Missal, or other liturgical rites of the Church.

"How can I determine the owner of a piece of music?"

- Separate sheet music or octavos
 - most often located in a notice at the bottom of the first page
- Music in hymnals
 - Usually printed in small type below the musical notation. This is often combined with the "acknowledgments" index in the back of the book.
 - Be aware that the melody of the song or hymn is often copyrighted separately from the text or lyrics of the song or hymn.
 - It is somewhat common for the melody of the song or hymn to be in the public domain while more recently composed text or lyrics are copyrighted.
- You will need to contact OneLicense.net to obtain licensing.

"What about the readings and the text of the Roman Missal?"

In worship aids:

- To license the readings for a worship aid, parishes can contact: Mary Elizabeth Sperry at mosperry@uscceb.org. If you need any other clarification, please call the Office for Divine Worship at 814-824-1271.
- For reprinting excerpts of the Roman Missal in a worship aid, credit is given to the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL).

On screens:

- The Committee on Divine Worship **does not** permit projecting readings and liturgical texts on screens during the liturgy. The bishops believe that since people spend much time on screens, the Sacred Liturgy should be a prayerful break from that. They also think screens distract from the liturgy itself.