

Copyright – To Copy or Not to Copy?

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"A picture is worth a thousand words" is an old adage that still rings true today, especially in our digital society. But did you know that the same picture could cost you thousands of dollars in copyright infringement fees if not obtained correctly? Unfortunately, many churches and mid councils are discovering that copyright needs to be top of mind when capturing images from the internet.

Companies and law firms specializing in copyright infringement are now using artificial intelligence to search the internet, including social media platforms, for copyrighted material. What may be an innocent and well-meaning Facebook post or website content inviting congregations to pray for those affected by a natural disaster could result in fees if the image associated with it is not properly obtained.

A simple Google search on any topic can produce thousands of images, but beware, images obtained in this fashion should not be used in any print or digital publications, including social media. Mike Kirk, General Counsel for Legal Risk and Management Services of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), A Corporation suggests, "Councils should disallow their employees and volunteers from cutting and pasting photos they find on the internet into newsletters and other documents they post on the internet." While there are fair use guidelines within the copyright code, it is confusing and not entirely clear. Using images, music, videos, etc., that are not in the public domain or Creative Commons license can be dangerous.

So, where can one get these important resources without fear of copyright? Thankfully, there are several very good options. The first and most effective in terms of imagery would be to create your own image library. With the quality of cell phone cameras today, it's easy to capture great photos from employees and members that resonate with your audience. "Just have people who provide photos sign a form giving the council's corporation permission to use the photos in bulletins, newsletters, etc.," reminds Mike Kirk.

If this approach seems too labor intensive or you need additional imagery, the following sites are great options to obtain royalty-free content, including images, video, and audio.

[Pixabay](#) is a vibrant community of creatives sharing royalty-free content. It is free to join and offers content under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license. You do not need to credit Pixabay or the contributor of Content when you use it, but it is certainly appreciated when you do so - especially when the use is of an editorial nature, where photo credits are more customary. You can provide credit in the following format: "by [Contributor] via [Pixabay](#)."

[Unsplash](#) is also a free resource that provides high-resolution images. All photos can be downloaded and used for commercial and non-commercial purposes for free. No permission is needed, but attribution is appreciated. [Unsplash](#) also offers a membership

subscription at a reasonable price, including members-only content, unlimited royalty-free downloads, and enhanced legal protections.

[Pexels](#) also provides over 3 million free high-resolution photos and videos. New images and videos are added daily. Finding the right image is easy by searching their trending images or curated collections.

[Pixabay](#), [Unsplash](#), and [Pexels](#) each have a mobile app available, making it a snap to post to social media or design on the go. Although there is no fee for the use of the photo or video, each of these resources makes it easy to thank the creator by donating directly to the artist or providing a shout-out to them on social media.

Copyright matters are serious matters that can have serious financial implications if not handled correctly. To steer clear of any problems, be sure to utilize a trusted royalty-free source such as those listed above. To keep up to date on the latest tools, resources, and communication strategies, join [the PC\(USA\) Communicators Network Facebook Group](#).