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Copyright and Parish Websites

Dear Fathers and others,

Recently a company representing copyright holders in the UK contacted the diocesan office and Fr Tad regarding a photo used on one of the parish websites which had infringed copyright laws. The infringement was unintentional, done by a volunteer who ran the website at the time. The volunteer's ignorance regarding copyright regulations didn't remove liability, the case was valid and the parish had to pay £79 to settle the case. It was a very lenient 'sentence' - similar cases can go into hundreds and thousands of pounds. This situation highlighted the importance of conforming to copyright law. With technology getting better by the day, automated searches of unlawfully used copyrighted content will lead to successful challenges by copyright holders' representatives. Fr Tad has kindly offered a few practical tips on running parish websites to mitigate the risk of copyright infringement. They are as follows.

What's copyrighted and what's not?

Copyright regulations can be complicated. But there's one simple rule you can follow to be on the safe side: as long as online **content** (articles, photos, images, videos etc.) isn't clearly and explicitly described as free-to-use (royalty-free), it's copyrighted. It means you should not 'copy & paste' it onto your website.

Another useful rule is that unless **content** is produced by the parish or for the parish use, it's copyrighted.

What you can do:

- **Links.** You can create interactive links on your website, leading to content on other websites. Visitors on your websites will open the original page on the original website.
- **Embed.** Many popular websites offer an option of embedding their content into another website. Essentially, their content is displayed and accessible on your website. The most popular example of that is YouTube; it allows to embed video clips by creating a piece of code (iFrame) that can be included in any website.
- **Royalty-free photo stocks.** There's a good number of websites offering royalty-free photos and images which **that** can be used on websites, mainly for non-commercial uses; parish websites fall into that category. One example is Pixabay (<https://pixabay.com>), but there are more.

- **Buy license.** There are many websites offering photos and images at affordable prices. They are licensed for specific uses, but those websites usually explain T&C in clear terms. One example is 123RF (<https://www.123rf.com>), but there are many more.

What you must not do:

- **Copy & paste.** When you publish content taken from another website on your website visitors will assume it's produced by you. That's a potential copyright infringement. Citations taken from other sources are OK as long as they are clearly indicated and not unreasonably long. Citing an entire article can be challenged.
- **Imagery.** When you publish a photo or image, adding its original source or author will not remove liability for copyright infringement. In fact, it's a requirement in many licences.
- **Ignorance.** Claiming ignorance regarding copyright regulations doesn't remove liability; it's a general rule of law.

The above is not an exhaustive and comprehensive guide on copyright law in the context of parish websites. It is recommended that you either discuss this matter with those who run your parish website or forward this short piece directly to them. In addition you need to review your parish website's content and remove any material where there is any doubt as to whether it's in line with copyright rules. Better safe than sorry!

If you need some **practical** - not legal - advice you can contact Fr Tad, preferably by email tadturski@rcda.scot

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Hugh OSB

+Hugh Gilbert OSB,
Bishop of Aberdeen