

# Hymnary Subscription Plan

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## Introduction

Hymnary.org was developed with grant funding and subsidies from CCEL, with the intent that it would eventually support itself, but revenue is still well below expenses. In fact, there was a point where we almost had to shut it down because CCEL was not able to subsidize it to the necessary extent. Now that grant funding has ended and Hymnary.org is maturing, it is time for Hymnary.org to carry its own weight financially if it is to survive long term.

Hymnary.org has a large number of infrequent users—325,000 unique visitors in the last month as of this writing—but a more limited number of heavy users. In the last 30 days, there were 9,717 visits by people who have visited more than 50 times. At a guess, there may be 5,000 people who have visited over 50 times. Anecdotally, some of these users have come to depend on Hymnary.org, even calling it an “addiction.” While the large number of infrequent users results in some advertising revenue, more is needed, and the small number of heavy users suggests subscriptions as a revenue source.

At the same time, one of the major limitations on the utility of Hymnary.org is that we can’t display all hymns because of copyright restrictions. This affects researchers, worship planners, and casual users, for example, those who would use Hymnary.org on a mobile device in the pew. A subscription program that offers full access to all hymns would be appealing to many users. If it is successful, it could also be the difference between mere survival for Hymnary.org, without much change or growth, to a growing, thriving project.

## Benefits for subscribers

Conceptually, the idea is that we will offer access to all copyrighted hymns to subscribers as an inducement to subscribe. This would be appealing to many users. However, this will require getting permission from each copyright holder—a time-consuming process and one which will never be complete. So in practice, we will offer access to *some* copyrighted hymns, initially perhaps just a few. We will also offer other benefits: the elimination of advertising and access to FlexScores for public domain hymns.

Hymn scores will be displayed as screen-resolution grayscale images. These will not print well, so it is unlikely they will be copied for worship services. We will also make it clear that this is a personal subscription that does not give subscribers permission to make copies of the hymn, e.g. for use in a worship service.

Financial considerations suggest a target of 500 subscribers at \$100 per year. To reach our target, we will need 10% of those 5,000 frequent users as subscribers.

That's a high percentage for a voluntary system, so we will probably also need to institute a monthly pageview limit for non-subscribers as well. This pageview limit will apply to views of text, tune, or author, authority or instance pages for non-DNAH hymns. Searches, hymnal page views, and DNAH data will be free. Page views will be tracked for all users, whether logged in or not. For users who are not logged in, page views will be limited by IP address. It will not be hard to work around the restrictions, e.g. by moving to a different computer, but that is OK. We can start out with a relatively high limit, perhaps 15 page views per month, and adjust that figure if necessary to achieve our target number of subscribers.

### Subscribers and Subscription Cost

There are many kinds of users of Hymnary.org: casual users, those who use it to plan worship services, and those who use it in another professional capacity—hymn authors, publishers, hymnal committees, scholars, and the like. There are also organizations that may wish to subscribe, especially colleges and universities.

For casual users, there are few pressing needs and other options, so we probably don't want to try to make them subscribe. They will go elsewhere.

The largest group of users is worship planners. We should make the site usable (perhaps limited) without subscription, but we should offer subscriber benefits significant enough to encourage some to subscribe. Worship planners from churches that have a hymnal in the pews may find Hymnary.org a convenient way to search for hymns, but they are unlikely to pay much for a subscription. However, worship planners at churches that do not have hymnals, perhaps those with blended worship, may find value in getting resources for hymns. For some of these, the inclusion of viewing copyrighted hymns and the public domain FlexScores in the subscription program may be enough to induce them to subscribe. Otherwise there may not be much incentive.

Hymn writers who wish to set their hymns to music will find significant value in a subscription that includes public domain FlexScores—they will be able to set their hymns to music and try out a number of tunes. Many of them may subscribe if public domain FlexScores are included.

For those who research hymns at Hymnary.org for professional reasons other than worship planning, we want virtually all of them to subscribe, and a relatively high price such as \$100 per year is warranted. For these users, FlexScores would not be an added incentive, but they are not FlexScore customers anyway. Page limits should suffice to induce these users to subscribe.

Students using the site will not have as much inducement from page limits. However, if we offer institutional subscriptions, faculty members requiring students to use Hymnary.org may encourage their institution to subscribe if prices are reasonable. Perhaps we can use the following pricing structure for annual subscriptions: \$100 for individuals, \$250 for small institutions (to 4,999 FTE students), \$450 for institutions with 5,000-14,999 students, and \$650 for

institutions with 15,000+ students. Institutional subscriptions should be authorized by IP address range.

We should pay a portion of the subscription fees to hymn copyright holders prorated according to the number of views of the texts and tunes in question. If we consider half of the subscription cost to go for publication of copyrighted hymns, with the other half paying for FlexScores and other benefits offered to subscribers, we could offer copyright holders the standard 25% of the copyright portion of subscription fees, that is, 12.5% of total subscription fees. These payments would be made twice a year and subject to a \$50 minimum payment per copyright administrator. If less than \$50 is owed, it will be saved for the next biannual payment. I estimate that the average number of copyrighted hymns a subscriber views per year is likely to be less than 500. That would make the payment per hymn view at least 2.5 cents—five to ten times the royalty for a hymn in a typical printed hymnal.

### Copyrights and Copyright Administrators

We will need a way to track the hymn texts and tunes we have permission to display to subscribers. These permissions will generally be given by a copyright holder or administrator for all the hymns they control. So we will need a database table of copyright administrators and another table of copyrights (labeled links from hymns to copyright administrators). The links will be labeled “text” or “tune” with an additional label that may say “descant”, “arrangement”, “verse 3”, etc. There should also be a date. There may be multiple such links per text or tune authority or hymn instance. The copyrights for text or tune instances are not necessarily the same as those for the authorities.

There will be a page for copyright administrators showing the name, contact information, and licensing organizations they partner with (CCLI, OneLicense.net, and/or Licensing). There will be place for a note about how to get permission to use their hymns. Editors should be able to edit this information. Then there should be a list of texts, tunes, descants, etc. for which they administer the copyright, paged if it is too long.

Hope requires us to have the user click through a copyright notice before allowing them to view the hymn. We will need a “clickthrough required” field in the copyright holder table, with another field containing the contents of the clickthrough message.

When we get permission from a publisher, such as GIA, to display their hymns to subscribers, we will mark that in the copyright holder record. We will then know that their copyrighted hymns may be displayed to subscribers.

Text, tune, and instance pages should list the copyright holders as they do now, but the information should be drawn from the copyright tables and linked to the copyright holder page. On the authority pages we should display contact information for the copyright holders.

Finally, we should have the option to export all the copyright holder names and addresses as a CSV file, with the intent that it could be used by Microsoft Word to create a form letter to send to all copyright holders.

## **Implementation**

The goal is to have the subscription program in place and live by the end of the summer of 2014. In addition to support for copyrights and copyright administrators outlined above, we will need to implement the following:

### ***Subscription Page***

There should be a subscription page outlining the need for Hymnary.org to have revenue in order to continue and the benefits afforded subscribers. Users who opt to subscribe enter credit card information (with an option to mail a check). Paypal would be an acceptable payment option, though handling credit card on our own page would be better.

### ***Viewing Copyrighted Hymns***

When a user views a text, tune, or instance page, the system should check whether the text and tune are copyrighted. For copyrighted hymns there are several cases, depending on whether we have permission to display the hymn and whether the user is a subscriber. If the copyright holder has not given us permission to display the text or tune, we could use a message like “This text [tune] is copyrighted and the copyright administrator has not given us permission to display it. Contact the copyright administrator for more information.”

If we do have permission to display the hymn to subscribers but this user is not a subscriber, the text or tune could be replaced with a message along the lines of “This hymn is copyrighted. [Subscribe to Hymnary.org](#) to see this and other copyrighted hymns.” The link should bring users to the subscription page.

### ***Advertising and FlexScores***

We will need to modify the various pages so that advertisements are not shown for logged-in subscribers. The FlexScore system should give access to public domain FlexScores to subscribers.

### ***Page view Limits and Logging***

Page views that are to be counted against the limit are text authority, tune authority, and instances pages for copyrighted texts or tunes, generally those dated 1923 or later. When users are logged in, the limits should apply to the user. For non-logged-in access, the limits should count against the IP address. There should be a configurable monthly limit, initially fairly high—perhaps 15. When there have already been 15 page views by this user in the last 30 days, there should be a message displayed that the user is over the monthly page view limit for non-subscribers, with a link to the subscription page.

This means that we will need a database table logging each page view for each IP address or user. In fact, we should log all page views of text, tune, person, and authority pages, for copyrighted and non-copyrighted hymns, so we can compute the popularity of hymns and account for page views.

### *Pageviews and Royalties*

In order to pay a portion of subscription revenue as royalty to copyright administrators, each copyright administrator will need a page they can log into where they can see the number of page views of their hymns and their relative popularity, both as a fraction of hymn page views and as an ordinal (1,257<sup>th</sup> most popular). They should also see past royalty payments and the amount currently due them.

Every six months we will have to send payments to the copyright administrators who are owed more than the threshold amount, e.g. \$50. We will need to be able to generate a report of payments owed that are greater than the threshold, with a way of indicating that the amount was paid with a certain check number on a certain date. If Calvin will permit, perhaps we could make these payments via Paypal or a similar online payment service.

### *Adding Copyright Administrators and Copyrights*

In order to implement this program, we will need to have copyright information for covered hymns in the new format, as well as copyright holder information. However, converting all copyright information to the new format and creating copyright holder entries for all parties will take some time. Perhaps we can code the system so that it will work with either sort of copyright information. Then we can convert copyright information as time permits, starting with hymns from copyright administrators who have given us permission to display their hymns.

### *Copyright Request Letter*

We will need to request several types of permission from copyright administrators. We will want to ask for the following permissions for all covered hymns:

- Permission to sell a FlexScore of the hymns (subject to approval of the actual FlexScore for each hymn if necessary)
- Permission to display first system of hymn (or half of hymn, if it has less than two systems) to everyone
- Permission to display the full text and/or tune to subscribers at screen resolution

We will have to write a standard request letter and send it to all copyright holders we can identify. For reference, there are 120 copyright holders listed for the hymns in *Lift Up Your Hearts*. The complete list of contact information is available at <http://liftupyourheartshymnal.org/copyright-holders-index>.

## Testing

This system will allow users to make online payments for a subscription to Hymnary.org, and it will compute amounts due to copyright holders. Any system that manages receipts and payments is critical; bugs are usually very serious problems. Therefore this system must be tested thoroughly before going live. Ideally, we would use about as much time and effort for testing and refinement as for the original development.

Early in the development we should construct a test suite of example transactions, page views, and the like, and develop against these tests. That is, the tests should cover all aspects of functionality, and it should be possible to run the tests with in a single step, returning a pass or a list of errors. Then the code implementing the system can be developed and fine-tuned until all the tests pass. This implies a separation between the code controlling the data model and the user interface.

It may be that some aspects of the user interface can't be tested in this way, but the functional parts of the system should all be developed using this test-driven development method.