

Guide to permissions: Carols for Christian Aid



Carol singing, in public and in church, has been a beloved Christmas tradition for generations. Because of this, there are many instances where by-laws relating to where and when you can sing are overlooked.

To help you cover all the bases, we have put together this guide to permissions to help you as you plan your event.

Many of the professional bodies we reviewed for this guide mentioned that seeking formal permission for carolling was rare enough that some local government bodies would not be familiar with the process!

What laws do I need to consider as I plan my event? Will I need any licences or other permissions?

Musical and entertainment events are covered under the Licensing Act 2003.

There are three potential issues you need to consider when running a singing event.

If a licence is required

Some councils, supermarkets, shopping centres and other venues will ask for a letter of authority from the charity confirming that you are known to Christian Aid and trusted to carry out a collection. If this is something you require, please contact the Central Supporter Engagement Team on hello@christian-aid.org or 020 7523 2493.

Spontaneous singing in the street or elsewhere does not require a licence – for example, people in a pub starting a singalong. However, if the event is arranged, a licence is required. Often, the music licence that the premises already holds will be sufficient.

A licence may be required to sing in a supermarket or shopping centre. Ask what licensing the venue you are using has, and contact your local authority if you are concerned the licence may not cover the event you are planning.

Nuisance

Someone not enjoying your singing or having a general distaste for carols would not have grounds to legally complain of nuisance. It would be necessary for the complainant to prove you are unreasonably preventing them from enjoying their property. However, a prolonged carol service or significantly amplified music could be a public nuisance.

There are no laws against singing or playing instruments on pavements, traffic islands or the middle of the road (please don't do this!). However, it is a criminal offence to obstruct the road by stopping the free flow of pedestrians or vehicles. You are responsible if your singing causes an obstruction, whether from your choir or the crowd. Plan for this when you pick a place to perform, and make sure there is enough room for pedestrians to pass safely.

Collecting money

To collect money at your carolling event, you need a collecting licence under the House-to-House Collections Act 1939. This is issued by a senior police officer. However, you may struggle to collect this form from a police station. Please be patient and apply for your collecting licence in plenty of time.

Collectors at your event must:

- be at least 16 years old
- wear a badge identifying them as a collector
- carry a certificate signed by the collector and an officer of the charity.

There are no known cases of carol singers being prosecuted for collecting for charity without police permission.

When planning your collection, ensure you check with the relevant groups (eg, local council or supermarket chain) that collections are allowed on the site.

This information has been collected from The Guild of Church Musicians. For more information, we suggest reading their article on licensing: bit.ly/3QeDTFd

What do I need to do to use a public venue?

For government-owned venues and public spaces, you need to contact your local council to check because rules and procedures may differ. You need to have answers to the following questions before contacting your local council:

- What is the location you would like to use? Are there alternatives you may consider? For example, if you want to use a local park, are there any other parks you would like to use if your first option is booked.
- When are you planning to have your event? How long will it last?
- How many people are you expecting at the event? Will there be a need for traffic management?
- Will there be an entry fee?

What do I need to do to use a private venue?

To use a private venue, you need permission from the venue's owners. Some things to think about before contacting them are:

- Are you willing to pay a fee to use the space? Would the owner consider letting you use the space for free to fundraise?

- Do you want to use the whole venue or is it the use of a room?
- When are you planning to have your event? How long will it last?
- How many people are you expecting at the event? Will there be a need for traffic management?



Is there anything I need to consider if I am holding the event at my own venue?

The primary consideration in a venue that you own is if you are causing a nuisance.

Do I need insurance?

There are no laws requiring you to have insurance for community events such as carols, but you may consider having insurance to cover anything that may go wrong. Christian Aid has public liability insurance that covers supporters holding events if a risk assessment has been carried out. You may also consider taking out public liability insurance.

For more information on insurance, visit: bit.ly/3FzuW4e

Can I use any songs?

When picking the set list for your event, you need to consider copyright. Songs and music whose composers died more than 70 years ago are in the public domain and you don't have to consider copyright. This is likely to include many of your favourite carols.

If you use newer songs, you need to get permission from the copyright holder to perform the song in public. This is especially important if you are planning to live stream or upload a video of your event because using songs without permission will lead to your video being taken down.