



Guide for Showing Movies in a Group

More Than “a Word” about Staying Legal

To show an entire video outside the home, a license is necessary. That FBI notice at the beginning of every home video is not for our entertainment, but a warning. A home video is just that, one sold or rented for use in a home. Any use outside the home, such as at church, is illegal, unless the exhibitor has a license from the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (MPLC) or its subsidiary, Christian Video Licensing International (CVLI). The MPLC claims to have 3,500 representatives around the country monitoring the use of video, so if you advertise a video program, the odds are that sooner or later an agent will be checking with you to see if you are licensed. A number of churches showing films for entertainment have been caught and fined for failure to procure such a license. It does not matter whether the church charges admission or not—in fact, a license will stipulate that the holder *cannot* charge admission.

An annual license costs a little under \$200 for small churches, and more for larger congregations, the fee based on the number of members. A church judicatory can take out a blanket license for all of its member churches, a considerable savings, so check with your regional office to see if this is the case before applying for a license. For full particulars on this go online to <http://www.cvli.org/> and click the United States tab at the top of the window.

When you open the page for the United States, click the Producers tab at the top to see the list of film companies that belong to the MPLC. Ignore the Family Values Producer Package, as this pertains only to so-called Christian productions. The Total Producer Package

includes virtually all of the major Hollywood film studios and some of the independent ones as well. To see what the cost is for your church, assuming it is not covered by a blanket license, click the Fees tab.

Having written about the need for a license, I would like to point out the following: the above holds true when showing an entire film at a special showing. The use of film clips in a regularly scheduled educational setting is a gray area. The MPLC and CVLI would say one is needed, but several authorities, including a film director, have told this author that when shown in a classroom, the “Fair Use” clause of the U.S. Copyright applies. This distinction is important because several of the films in The Thoughtful Christian series are not on the CVLI producer list. The following is taken directly off the MPLC Web site from the section “About US Copyright Law:”

Videos may also be shown without a license in non-profit educational institutions (i.e. public schools and universities) and in certain narrowly defined “face-to-face teaching activities” (Section 110.1) in which the movie is directly related to the curriculum and a teacher is present. The law makes a specific, limited exception for such showings. (Sections 106 and 110(1))

You may consider going ahead and taking out a license, even if at first your plans do not call for viewing an entire movie. Once a class watches clips from a film, members might enjoy inviting the rest of the congregation to see and discuss the entire film. Chances are that some class members will want to go on and set up a film group. Many churches now have regular film viewing and discussion groups that meet in the evening on a regular basis. Such groups, unless they meet in a member’s home, do require a license.

DVD Equipment and Room Set-up

1. Make sure that the church's or a class member's DVD player and TV monitor are available on the date(s) of your class.
2. If possible, assign someone else to be responsible for operating the equipment so that you can be freed for teaching. If this is not possible, be sure that you know exactly how the equipment works. A great deal of valuable class time can be wasted while the teacher tries to get unfamiliar machines to work.
3. Always wipe the DVD disk with a clean lint-free cloth before inserting it into the player. The laser that "reads" the disk is very sensitive and thus might stall if it encounters even the tiniest smudge. Many a program has been interrupted when the picture froze or was broken up, so be sure to clean the disk beforehand.
4. On some DVDs the user can go directly to the menu and find Scene Selection, but on many, you must wait until the FBI Warning and Coming Attractions play through. Thus it is wise to set up the DVD before the class begins. Click Scene Selection; move the cursor to the bottom of the screen and right-click the scene groups until the one with the scene you want appears. Then move the cursor up until that scene is highlighted, click on it, and set the player on Pause.
5. Set the monitor away from windows so that viewers will not be bothered by backlighting. If the monitor faces a window or hall light, check to make sure that reflections on the screen do not get in the viewers' way.
6. Check the chairs to make sure that even those sitting on the ends of the rows can see the screen. (A common mistake is to make the rows of chairs too wide, with the people on the ends having a distorted, oblique angle view of the screen.)
7. If the group is small, arrange the chairs in a semicircle around the TV monitor.
8. Assign someone to operate the room lights at your given cues.

Leading a Film Discussion

1. Do not feel that you have to be an expert on film in general or this one in particular in order to have a good discussion. The discussion process followed in the Thoughtful Christian film series is student- rather than teacher-oriented. Thus it is meant to help the participants get the most out of the film experience, not to provide leaders with a forum for showing off their knowledge. If a question is raised for which you do not have an answer, freely admit this and suggest that the group might try to discover it.
2. The role of the leader is to be a guide and to ensure that no one person dominates the discussion. Try to provide an opportunity for everyone to contribute to the discussion—and yet if someone does not want to participate, do not embarrass or force him or her to say something, other than "I pass."
3. Leaders should not feel that they have to stay strictly with the questions or use all of them. Other concerns and questions could come up while watching the clips, so let flexibility be the watchword.
4. Keep the discussion focused, though not obsessively so. Some members will tend to go off on a tangent, so gently bring the group back, perhaps saying that the point is interesting but could be discussed at another time, perhaps after the class.
5. Open and close with prayer, thus making clear that this is not just a film discussion affair, but also one of engaging film and faith.