



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Christ Church Cranbrook Awarded \$5 Million Grant from Lilly Endowment Inc, To Reframe the Narrative About Faith in Detroit

Bloomfield Hills, Mich.(January 12, 2026) — Christ Church Cranbrook today announces a \$5 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its National Storytelling Initiative on Christian Faith and Life 2025 to fund a catalytic four-year project, *Faith in Detroit*, that will build a new ecosystem of storytelling by and for Detroiters. As a service to the city and region, this grant will fund an extensive collaboration of partners convened by Christ Church Cranbrook. The grant's purpose is to find and to share compelling and true stories of faith by Metro Detroiters to shift the larger narrative frame of the city from rise-and-ruin to resilience-and-resurrection. In the process, Faith in Detroit hopes to guide individuals and local communities toward a shared future.

In this project, Metro Detroiters will be empowered to share their voices and stories about faith in their city via television, video, online journaling, apps, in theater and otherwise in every way possible.

"Our title, *Faith in Detroit*, speaks to two critical objectives of this project," said the Rev. Dr. William Danaher, Rector of Christ Church Cranbrook and Executive Director of the project. "First, we want to empower Metro Detroiters to tell their faith stories that catalyze so much good in the communities and neighborhoods in our city and surrounding area. What makes these stories and storytellers so compelling is that they express deep fidelity for and in the city of Detroit itself, no matter where in the region someone lives."

"Second, the dominant narrative known to the wider world about Detroit is that we are a city of rise and ruin," said Danaher. "But my experience shows that the real story of Detroit is one of resurrection and resilience, told each day by word and action by the faithful people in our city. These storytellers must be empowered and their stories shared because they tell a more compelling story that has been hidden in plain sight."

"We are looking for true stories of the Christian faith in practice in Metro Detroit," said Danaher. "These stories will take seriously that Detroit is a city of many and varied religious communities and that cooperation among these communities is essential for an authentic expression of Christian faith."

Because every Detroit success story hinges on people working together, the *Faith in Detroit* project is firmly based on collaboration. To tell the stories of Detroiters through a wide array of media and platforms while building lasting community capacities for storytelling, *Faith In Detroit* brings together a diverse group of notable institutional and community partners. They include:



Faith In Detroit

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- Detroit PBS, which brings its deep community relationships as well as its capacity to create video content that can be seen by its audiences on television and online across the region
- Detroit Opera, which will commission an opera based on the compelling, true stories of faith developed through the Faith in Detroit storytelling ecosystem.
- Satori Shakoor of The Secret Society of Twisted Storytellers, who will serve as a consultant to the project and curate stories from her work for wider distribution.
- Ecumenical Theological Seminary, which will offer storytelling in its curriculum for students in all of its degree programs.
- Oakland University Center for Public Humanities, which will provide faculty writing expertise and help to create an online journal program and writing intensive so that storytellers identified through the Faith in Detroit story ecosystem can develop their storytelling capacities.
- Billy Mark, a Detroit-based interdisciplinary artist and cultural organizer, who will great a GPS-based app to mark faith encounters and a separate app what will allow users to tell and/or hear stories
- Storymaker, a creative content and production company, which will provide production and ideation services
- The Cranbrook Project at Christ Church Cranbrook, which will include storytelling as part of its free Friday concert series

"We share the vision of *Faith in Detroit* as a rare and timely opportunity to deepen the understanding of the role of faith in our community and helping to tell the Detroit story accurately and more broadly," said Rich Homberg, CEO of Detroit PBS. "Together, we will create a lasting resource for Detroit and beyond."

"The opportunity for our students, faculty, and campus community members to contribute to *Faith in Detroit's* impactful vision will be a source of pride for years to come," said Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, President, Oakland University. "We see this as a way for the university to give back to our entire community."

"Detroit Opera's core mission is to share relevant and meaningful stories through the medium of opera; an art form whose roots trace back to church-sponsored liturgical dramas," said Patty Isacson Sabee, President and CEO of Detroit Opera. Today, "Detroit hosts a diverse range of faith communities, highlighting the city's rich mix of cultures and religious traditions."



Faith In Detroit

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Working with the *Faith in Detroit* group, we look forward to telling the true stories of Detroit's faith community through our commissioned opera project."

"This initiative has the potential to open multiple avenues for engaging communities throughout Metro Detroit – and beyond – through the transformative power of storytelling," Satori Shakoor, The Secret Society of Twisted Storytellers. "We are looking forward to playing a role."

"It is vital to collect these living stories of faith and resilience now, so we can witness the spiritual dimensions of how communities have preserved and rebuilt this city," said Billy Mark, Detroit interdisciplinary artist and cultural organizer.

"This grant offers the opportunity to not focus on what Detroit lost; but to place the lens on a celebration of what it has found. We'll dive into the incredible, untold stories of the people who are a living testament to the city's resilience. This is a chance to show the world the true heart of Detroit, a city not just rebuilding, but with God's help, rising," said Mike Brooks, Executive Director of Branding & Content at Storymaker.

"We are delighted to be collaborating on this critical project with Christ Church Cranbrook, with whom we have been working since our seminary was founded in 1957," said The Rev. Dr Theodore Turman, President of Ecumenical Theological Seminary. "*Faith in Detroit* offer us an opportunity to be part of something special – something with the potential to transform not only the stories we tell about Detroit, but Detroit itself."

Danaher added that the timing of the Lilly Endowment grant makes this project even more relevant. "The world needs this now," he said. "Detroit's true story of faith has been with us for generations. I am humbled to have the opportunity to empower these storytellers and lift their stories up. These stories have the power to change the way the world thinks while seeing ourselves in a new way. This project will empower people to create deeper connections - to their faith and to each other."

Individuals can start sharing their stories now, while learning more about the project, at faithindetroit.org.

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Faith In Detroit

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About Lilly Endowment Inc

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by J.K. Lilly, Sr. and his sons Eli and J.K. Jr. through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. Although the gifts of stock remain a financial bedrock of the Endowment, it is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders' wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion and maintains a special commitment to its founders' hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. A primary aim of its grantmaking in religion is to deepen the religious lives of Christians, principally by supporting efforts that enhance congregational vitality and strengthen the leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment values the broad diversity of Christian traditions and endeavors to support them in a wide variety of contexts. The Endowment also seeks to foster public understanding about religion by encouraging fair, accurate and balanced portrayals of the positive and negative effects of religion on the world and lifting up the contributions that people of all faiths make to our greater civic well-being.

About Christ Church Cranbrook

Christ Church Cranbrook is a welcoming and inclusive faith community transformed by God's acceptance, love, and grace. As a church, we are actively engaged in the work of justice and compassion in our community and beyond. Find out more about who we are, our vision and beliefs, our services of worship, our sermons, our programs, our opportunities for Christian education for all ages, and the many ways we serve our wider community. Learn more about the parish at <https://christchurchcranbrook.org>.