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Lilly Endowment Gives $246.5 Million to Tell Christian Faith Stories

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Often goes untold in mainstream media"

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Picture a small country church on a Sunday evening, the light coming low through the windows, and an older member of the congregation telling the younger ones how this church survived - how a neighbour was fed, a marriage was mended, a prayer was answered. That is the kind of story Lilly Endowment has just backed with $246.5 Million in new grants to 61 organisations, to collect and share stories about the vitality and hope of Christian faith. It is the largest round yet of the Endowment's National Storytelling Initiative on Christian Faith and Life.

The grants, approved by the Indianapolis-based Endowment and announced this week, will fund documentaries, podcasts, oral histories, journalism and digital media. The recipients range from seminaries and universities to denominational bodies and faith media - and among them is Village Missions, which serves small rural congregations and will gather stories of humble acts of service in country churches.

That choice of recipient says everything about what the Endowment is trying to do. The faith stories it wants told are not the famous ones. They are the ordinary ones - the faithful pastor of a twenty-person church, the volunteer who has cooked the Wednesday meal for thirty years, the teenager who stayed when everyone else left.

Lilly Endowment Storytelling Initiative: $246.5 Million For 61 Organisations

The initiative began in December 2024, and this is its third round. The first, an invitational round, funded 12 organisations - including Christianity Today, Fuller Theological Seminary, America Media and the National Council of Churches - with grants of up to $5 million each. The second round, in November 2025, made 48 grants totalling about $232.6 Million.

This third round, announced in November 2026, is the biggest on both counts: $246.5 Million across 61 organisations. Across all three rounds, the initiative has now funded storytelling at 123 organisations in total - a remarkable bet on the idea that the story of faith is worth telling properly.

The Endowment's concern, as it has stated it, is that public perceptions of Christianity are shaped by controversy instead of the everyday faithfulness of ordinary believers. The headlines show the arguments; they rarely show the prayer meeting, the food bank, the hospital visit. These grants are meant to close that gap.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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