



Press Release

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Women Religious Archives Collaborative Receives \$4.7 Million Grant to Share the Stories of Catholic Sisters

(CLEVELAND, OH — December 15, 2025) The Women Religious Archives Collaborative (WRAC) received a \$4.7 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. through its National Storytelling Initiative on Christian Faith and Life. The grant will fund a 5-year project to share the inspiring stories of Catholic sisters, past and present, as examples of vibrant Christian lives and service.

The nonprofit Women Religious Archives Collaborative was founded in 2022 by a collaboration of Catholic sisters in response to a growing need to plan for the future of their archives. The Women Religious Archives Collaborative is building an independent repository and heritage center, set to open in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2027 that will house collections from over 75 congregations and share the history of Catholic sisters through research, exhibits, and programming. Forty-four congregations have committed their collections to date.

These collections show how women religious significantly impacted the United States through their tireless efforts in education, healthcare, spiritual formation, and social service since their arrival in 1727. “This generous grant will amplify our mission to preserve and share the histories of Catholic sisters in the United States by supporting the processing of archival collections, identification of compelling stories within them, and the sharing of these stories in relatable and engaging ways,” said Executive Director, Sister Susan Durkin, OSU.

The 5-year project, *So the Stories Can Be Told*, will connect a diverse multigenerational audience with stories of Catholic sisters by drawing on the histories within their archives. Visitors and researchers will encounter the real lives and struggles of these faith-filled women through multimedia in-person and online exhibits, storytelling programs, and a research fellowship. The project aims to increase awareness of the role of women religious, inspire reflection on Christian faith and service, and provide practical wisdom for personal and communal growth.

“Catholic sisters have spent their lives in service to others. Their tremendous contributions have lifted up and made positive and lasting change in the communities

where they served,” said Durkin. “Through this storytelling project, current and future generations will be able to learn from the stories of women religious about the role of faith and service, women’s leadership, and the power of community to make meaningful change to better our world.”

The focus of Lilly Endowment’s National Initiative on Christian Faith and Life is to help organizations identify, produce, and share compelling stories that portray the vibrancy and hope of Christian faith and life. The Women Religious Archives Collaborative is one of 60 U.S. organizations that received grants through the initiative since 2024. These groups include media organizations, denominational judicatories, church networks, publishers, educational institutions, congregations, and other nonprofit charitable organizations.

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 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 of religion by encouraging fair, accurate, and balanced portrayals of religion’s positive and negative effects on the world and by lifting up the contributions that people of all faiths make to our greater civic well-being.