



Compelling Preaching Initiative

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

2023

Lilly Endowment is pleased to announce its Compelling Preaching Initiative. The primary aim of this initiative is to cultivate practices among aspiring and active preachers that can help them to proclaim the gospel to a variety of audiences in more engaging and effective ways.

In this open and competitive national initiative, eligible charitable organizations may submit proposals for grants of up to \$1.25 million that may be used for up to a five-year period to develop new and/or enhance existing programs that present promising strategies to further the aim of the initiative. In their proposals, organizations should address the following guiding questions:

1. How might preaching better inspire, encourage and guide people in the United States today to come to know and love God and to live out their Christian faith more fully? How might preachers more effectively reach and benefit increasingly diverse audiences both within and beyond congregations?
2. What forms of preaching must preachers utilize today to communicate the Christian message effectively to church members as well as to others seeking meaning and purpose for their lives? How might preachers best use traditional (e.g., pulpit preaching, writing) and non-traditional (e.g., video, social media) forms of communication to reach a variety of audiences?
3. How is compelling preaching by aspiring and current preachers best cultivated and supported? What kinds of educational and peer learning experiences, resources, support structures and spiritual formation opportunities can help individuals become more compelling preachers?

The Endowment is seeking to support organizations that demonstrate in their proposals the capacity to design, implement and sustain high-quality programs that advance the initiative's aim. It anticipates awarding approximately 60 grants to charitable organizations that submit the most promising and compelling proposals. Grant awards will be announced in fall 2023.

Interest Form and Letter of Interest: Interested charitable organizations should complete and submit the **online Interest Form and a one-page Letter of Interest by March 1, 2023**. Although not a requirement, the submission of the Interest Form and Letter of Interest indicates the organization's intent to submit a proposal and assists the Endowment in implementing the initiative.

Proposal Submission: **Proposals are due by May 15, 2023** and must be submitted through the Compelling Preaching webpage on the Endowment's website.

The rationale, eligibility, selection criteria, application process, proposal guidelines and submission checklist are described more fully below.

Rationale

“But how are they to call on one (Jesus Christ) in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!...So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.’” (Romans 10:14-15, 17)

Writing to the Christian community in Rome nearly two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul declared the centrality of preaching for the growth and vitality of the early Christian church. Although the basic tenets of the gospel message have remained the same, Christian proclamation has evolved considerably during the last two thousand years. At many points in history, preachers have adapted their communication practices – innovating or occasionally returning to specific forms, measures and metaphors – to engage new generations of hearers more effectively. They have taken the gospel message into fields and homes, rearranged the design of church sanctuaries around different practices of preaching, portrayed Christian narratives through stained glass and other media to complement the spoken word, and used new media, such as print, radio, television and other new technologies, to expand the reach of their ministries. Perhaps more subtly, but of equal importance, they have often shifted the tone and focus of their messages as well as their approach to scripture to ensure that the gospel message was heard by each succeeding generation.

Many religious leaders believe that Christian churches may be at another key inflection point in history today when preachers may again need to adapt their approaches to preaching to reach, inspire and contribute to the spiritual development of hearers in their rapidly changing demographic, social and cultural contexts. In responding to these rapid changes, preachers may need to explore again theological questions about the aims of preaching and gain clarity about the kinds of preaching needed today to address the spiritual hungers of different audiences. They also may need to gain greater understanding of emerging forms of media and learn new communication skills to reach audiences in diverse contexts in new ways and to encourage a favorable hearing of the gospel. For example, religious leaders have expressed their concern about the increasing disaffiliation of individuals and families from local churches, especially young people. Many preachers and church leaders recognize that older forms of preaching are not reaching young people, especially those who rely heavily on newer forms of social media to gather information about the world around them and communicate with others. This current wave of disaffiliation has generated among preachers and other church leaders a sense of urgency and a greater awareness of the need to take new directions to share compelling accounts of the gospel with diverse audiences and to nurture the religious lives of hearers.

During the past three years, Lilly Endowment has received many reports from pastors and other church leaders about significant challenges facing preachers. They note especially that the COVID-19 pandemic has required many preachers to learn new preaching practices for proclaiming the gospel through digital technologies, including social media. At the same time, many preachers have shared that heightened awareness about long-standing social disparities and injustices has generated a sense of urgency to preach prophetically, calling them to craft sermons that encourage and inspire hearers to examine and address racial inequities embedded in their congregations and communities. Preachers also report the difficulty of preaching to communities divided by deep political and cultural polarizations. Many also have noted the increasing diversity of the congregations and communities that they serve.

A consideration of current realities and previous adaptations raises a series of additional questions that complement the initiative’s guiding questions. Among them are:

- What current approaches to preaching remain effective today? What adaptations and innovations are needed to make preaching more effective and impactful?
- Where are new audiences to be found, and how can preachers engage them?
- What approaches to preaching are most appropriate and effective for reaching younger people from a variety of backgrounds? For reaching hearers in increasingly diverse contexts?
- How might preaching inspire and empower hearers to become “proclaimers” themselves and to share the gospel with others?
- How can preaching most effectively call attention to racial inequities and social disparities in communities and encourage hearers to engage in acts of love, healing and justice in fractured times?

A key element of this work is theological in character. In addition to the variety of forms and media it may employ, compelling preaching also must be grounded in the theological convictions of particular Christian traditions and their understandings of the ways in which preaching fulfills a variety of longings and needs in the lives of its hearers. A partial description of the nature and aims of preaching, drawing on a variety of Christian traditions, would include the following characterizations:

- It is the word of God, connecting the hearer with divine transcendence.
- It is a human word, making the transcendent approachable and understandable.
- It is transformational, leading to conversion and continual renewal.
- It is instructive, imparting truth and providing practical counsel.
- It is preparatory, guiding the hearer toward participation in the Eucharist.
- It is inspirational, building hope and resilience through the work of the Spirit.
- It leads to action, contributing to the spread of faith and human flourishing (individually, relationally, and societally).
- It is communal, calling the hearer into community while also shaping the culture and practices of that community.

An effective preaching ministry requires a range of preaching skills, a life of integrity and engagement, and a commitment to preaching sermons that carry out all of the above-mentioned functions on a sufficiently regular basis.

Another key element of this initiative will be lifting up preachers who are at the forefront of effectively adapting preaching to changing circumstances. These exemplary preachers are learning how to reach congregational members as well as new listeners in a variety of contexts and discovering why listeners find their approaches to proclaiming the gospel so compelling. Who are the exemplars of compelling preaching today, and how might others best learn from their practices?

In designing the initiative, the Endowment recognizes that compelling preaching must be grounded in the theological convictions, ecclesial practices and cultures of specific Christian communities. Reflecting their remarkable diversity, churches communicate the gospel through many different preaching styles and practices and place different emphases on the role of preaching, especially in the context of worship and in relationship to observance of the sacraments. The initiative is not intended to suggest a singular, one-size-fits-all response to the guiding questions noted above. Rather, it is intended as an invitation for organizations to explore and respond to urgent questions about how preachers who share the gospel with hearers in a broad variety of contexts can communicate more effectively with specific audiences in ways that are theologically informed and contextually appropriate for their various Christian traditions and constituencies.

Eligibility, Selection Criteria and Application Process

Charitable organizations in the United States with Internal Revenue Code (Code) section 501(c)(3) and public charity status that support Christian pastoral leaders, churches and other Christian organizations are eligible to apply for grants in the Compelling Preaching Initiative. Eligible organizations may submit proposals of up to \$1.25 million each that may be used for up to a five-year period to develop new and/or enhance existing programs that advance the aim of the initiative stated above and present strategies that respond to the guiding questions posed in this RFP.

Eligible organizations are encouraged to design and/or enhance programs for preachers that are aligned with their mission and appropriate for their religious constituencies. Although the Endowment is interested in supporting proposals that present a broad variety of approaches, it is especially interested in programs that focus on one or more of the following:

1. Helping pastors gain deeper understanding about what makes preaching compelling for various audiences and in different contexts.
2. Assisting pastors in engaging in practices and developing skills and competencies that will make their preaching more compelling, including the use of new media or preaching formats.
3. Exploring collaboratively with other pastors how their preaching might cultivate greater commitment to the church's shared work of proclamation.

The Endowment also anticipates that many proposed programs will provide resources for and engage preachers in a variety of activities, including but not limited to: gathering preachers into peer learning groups, providing coaching for preachers, encouraging collaborative sermon planning and development, providing spiritual direction, creating ongoing opportunities for preachers to listen to responses from hearers, bringing preachers into conversation and community with exemplars whose practices can be learned, bringing preachers into contact with new or recent research that provides insight into their audiences and/or practices, and creating high quality resources for preachers to engage individually or in community with others. These kinds of activities may engage preachers from single denominations, traditions, and/or demographics or preachers from a broad variety of backgrounds. They may also be primarily local, regional, or national in scope.

While considering their potential approaches and program activities, organizations may also wish to read through the descriptions of programs that received funding through a previous phase of the Compelling Preaching Initiative. Descriptions of these programs may be found [here](#).

Funding decisions will be based in significant part on the extent to which proposals meet the following criteria:

- The organization articulates clear responses to the initiative's three guiding questions (page 1) as well as to any of the complementary questions found on the third page that are pertinent for the organization's program and context.
- The proposed program's purpose, rationale, design and outcomes clearly align with and hold significant promise to advance the initiative's aim (page 1).
- The program's outcomes and performance indicators to gauge the program's progress toward these outcomes are clearly articulated, realistic and compelling.
- The organization demonstrates that it has the ability and commitment to sustain the program, if successful, beyond the grant period.

The Endowment encourages each organization to apply for the amount appropriate to its capacity, the needs of the proposed program and the organization's ability to sustain the program beyond the end of the grant period. Organizations should have no expectation that Endowment funding will be available to sustain the program after the grant period ends. Successful organizations are expected to continue their programs from other funding sources.

Grant funds may be used to fund the costs of developing and launching a new and/or enhancing an existing program. Grant funds may not be used for endowments or operating expenses unrelated to the program.

Interested organizations are asked to use the following application procedures and timeline:

Interest Form and Letter of Interest: Submit the online Interest Form and a one-page Letter of Interest through the Endowment's website by March 1, 2023. The Letter of Interest should be signed by the organization's president or chief executive officer. The letter should be uploaded as a PDF through the Compelling Preaching webpage and submitted along with the online Interest Form. The submission of an Interest Form and Letter of Interest is not required, but it will inform the Endowment of the organization's interest and aid in the implementation of the initiative.

Application Form: Submit a complete proposal through the online Compelling Preaching Initiative Application Form on the Endowment's website by May 15, 2023.

The Endowment anticipates notifying organizations of funding decisions in fall 2023.

Proposal Guidelines

A complete proposal must include the following:

Official Request Letter: The proposal must be accompanied by an official request letter signed by the organization's president or chief executive officer and the chair of its governing board.

Information Form: This form provides key information about the proposal and the appropriate contact persons for the organization and proposed program. Please complete this form (linked on page 8 and found on the submission page of the Compelling Preaching Initiative webpage) and submit it with a PDF of the completed proposal.

Executive Summary: This is a one-page summary that describes the organization, its mission and constituencies, the primary purpose of the proposed program and its key activities. (Not included in the 12-page limit for the Proposal Narrative described below.)

Summary Budget: This is a one-page summary of the proposed program's budget that should condense budget line items from the detailed Line-Item Budget described on page 7. See the Guide to Budget Preparation.

Proposal Narrative: The narrative should provide the following information and not exceed 12 pages in length, excluding the Executive Summary, Budget, Budget Narrative, Summary Budget, Program Timetable and other accompanying materials:

Purpose: State the proposed program's purpose. In a broad sense, what does the organization hope to accomplish through its program? How will the program advance the initiative's primary aim?

Rationale: Provide a rationale for the proposed program. Why is it important for the organization to undertake this work? In this section, organizations should respond to the guiding questions described on the first page of the RFP as well as to any of the complementary questions found on the third page that are pertinent for the organization's program and context. How does the program align with the organization's mission?

Program Design: Provide a detailed description of what the organization intends to do. What is the program's overall design and what are its key activities? In other words, who is the target audience for the program? How many aspiring and/or current preachers will it serve? How will it serve these preachers (e.g., peer learning groups of preachers, educational events, production of research and other resources)? How will the program's activities result in a coherent and effective strategy that advances the program's purpose? The description should include the identification of leaders who will be responsible for implementing program activities. It also should list any potential collaborating organizations that will assist with the program's implementation. The roles and responsibilities of any collaborating organizations in the overall program should be stated.

Evaluation: Provide a description of how the organization will measure the program's progress toward its intended outcomes.

- **Outcomes:** Provide a description of the specific outcomes the organization hopes to achieve through its program. In other words, what are the anticipated outcomes for aspiring and active preachers, for churchgoers and non-churchgoers who hear sermons, for congregations and other faith communities, for organizations that teach preaching and support preachers, and/ or for sharing compelling accounts of the gospel with public audiences? What are the anticipated outcomes related to encouraging preachers to share the gospel through different media? What other outcomes are anticipated if the program is successful?
- **Performance Indicators:** List and describe specific performance indicators that will be used to measure the proposed program's progress toward each of the outcomes stated above. What indicators would provide convincing evidence that the program is on the right track? Please include the intervals for achieving these outcomes in a timetable.

Please Note: Performance indicators may include quantitative and qualitative markers to gauge the program's progress toward its outcomes. Examples of quantitative performance indicators may include: an increasing number of aspiring and active preachers who participate in program activities each year, an increasing number of people (both churchgoers and non-churchgoers) who hear sermons and find them compelling, an increasing use of traditional and non-traditional media by preachers, and/or an increasing frequency of engagement by preachers with resources or opportunities produced by preaching programs. Examples of qualitative performance indicators may include: an increasing degree to which preachers gain confidence and skills in strengthening their preaching, an increasing degree to which churchgoers and other listeners find preaching more compelling and/or an increasing awareness and comfort among preachers in using different forms of communication to share the gospel with diverse audiences. The Endowment encourages each organization to give special attention to qualitative outcomes and performance indicators as it designs its program.

- **Evaluation Plan:** What is the organization's plan to evaluate the proposed program? How will the organization track the program's performance indicators? What qualitative and quantitative

methods will the organization use in the evaluation process (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys)? Who is responsible for evaluation?

Communication: Provide a communication plan that describes how the organization intends to communicate what is learned through the implementation of the program. With whom will the organization seek to communicate what is learned?

Sustainability and Continuation: Describe how activities developed and/or enhanced through the program will be sustained into the future. How does the organization intend to support financially the activities that have been successful? How will new sources of funding be cultivated to replace grant dollars? How will other organizational and intellectual resources be secured and deployed to sustain the momentum of this endeavor into the future?

Organizational Capacity: Provide a brief description of the organization, including its mission, organizational structure, key staff (especially as related to the proposed program), relationship to a Christian denomination or tradition, annual operating budget and major sources of revenue that support its operating budget.

Anticipated Obstacles: Describe any anticipated obstacles in implementing the program. What challenges does the organization anticipate facing? What are key strategies for addressing these challenges? What initial or ongoing technical assistance will be needed to address anticipated challenges?

Program Timetable: Provide a high-level timetable of the proposed program's key activities, including evaluation (i.e., when specific performance indicators will be assessed to track progress towards outcomes), communication and sustainability activities. (Not included in the 12-page limit for the Proposal Narrative.)

Line-Item Budget and Budget Narrative: Please prepare a Line-Item Budget and Budget Narrative for the activities described in the Proposal Narrative. (Not included in the 12-page limit for the Proposal Narrative.)

Line-Item Budget: A detailed Line-Item Budget should specify how grant funds will be used. Please follow the "Guide to Budget Preparation." Note that the budget categories are for illustrative purposes. The Endowment recommends that the organization work closely with those responsible for accounting procedures and financial policies in the organization to create a budget that aligns with those procedures and policies.

Budget Narrative: A Budget Narrative should describe the calculations for each line item in the grant budget.

Copy of Organization's Operating Budget for its Current Fiscal Year: Please submit a copy of the organization's operating budget for the current year.

Copy of Organization's Annual Financial Statement: Please submit a copy of the organization's annual financial statement for the most recently completed fiscal year. The financial statement should include a balance sheet, income and expense statement, and any footnotes or supporting schedules that provide an accurate assessment of the financial condition of the organization. The financial statement may be from an internal review of accounts, from an outside agency or from a formal audit.

Exempt Status Charity/Foundation Status Information Form: This form verifies the organization's tax status as a charitable organization under applicable United States federal tax law.

Copy of Internal Revenue Service Tax Status Determination Letter: Please include a copy of the organization's Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax-exempt status determination letter. This letter provides official verification of the organization's status as a Code section 501(c)(3) public charity. Please note: many denominationally related organizations may not have asked for or received such a letter from the IRS. If that is the case, determine whether the organization is listed in a group exemption ruling for the denomination. If so, please attach evidence that the organization is covered by the ruling (for example, by sending copies of the directory cover and the page on which the organization is listed in the official directory of your denomination). No grants will be awarded until the proper tax status is confirmed.

Letter(s) of support (where applicable): If the proposed program involves collaboration with other organizations, letters of support from the leaders of the other organizations should be submitted with the application.

Submission Checklist

Proposals must be submitted by May 15, 2023 through the online Compelling Preaching Initiative application form on the [Endowment's website](#). The proposal must be uploaded as a single PDF with the following items in the order listed below and one (1) duplicate copy of the Budget in Excel format. The Endowment anticipates announcing grant awards in fall 2023.

- Official request letter
- [Information Form](#)
- Executive Summary (not to exceed one page)
- [Summary Budget](#)
- Proposal Narrative (not to exceed 12 pages)
- Proposal Timetable
- [Line-Item Budget](#)
- [Budget Narrative](#)
- Copy of Organization's Current Year Operating Budget
- Copy of Organization's Annual Financial Statement
- [Exempt Status Charity/Foundation Status Information Form](#)
- Internal Revenue Service Tax Status Determination Letter ([see sample](#))
- Letter(s) of support (where applicable)

Please email questions to preaching@lei.org.