

WE SUSTAIN EACH OTHER

At 109 years old, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baltimore had deep roots in the community but was in danger of closing. The congregation's unstable situation was akin to many others in southeast Baltimore in 2009, the year Mark Parker, their current pastor, arrived.

Parker said it was their synod's director for evangelical mission that suggested rapidly transforming the congregation by focusing on the surrounding community. This changed St. Paul into what is now known as Breath of God Lutheran Church.

"A congregation in decline in terms of numbers and energy and people has a really hard time reversing that because you need resources in order to do different things," Parker said. "Each year [the new-start funds] gave us room to grow without a sense of scarcity or anxiety it could all fall apart next month because we couldn't pay the bills."

Breath of God is in an area that is rich in diversity.

In order to grow, the congregation began to shift its focus outward to its surrounding neighborhood.

"We do a lot more community outreach than we did in the last 25 years," said longtime member Joe Burk. "The building is used every day of the week."

The new direction invigorated current members and began attracting new ones.

"I felt inspired in a way where I haven't felt before from a church," said member Jennifer Pruitt.

The change in focus would not have been possible were it not for the funds Breath of God received through Mission Support, according to Parker. At the same time, they contribute between 10 and 12 percent of their annual offerings to Mission Support.

"It's interesting because we give Mission Support and then we're getting it back," he said. "That's how the church works; we sustain each other."

 Watch a video of Breath of God members discussing their ministry at [ELCA.org/SOFIA](https://elca.org/SOFIA).

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support directors for evangelical mission and new congregations like Breath of God.

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God's work. Our hands.