VITAL CONGREGATIONS

Two become one

On a recent Sunday, Mark Rollenhagen noticed something special as he looked out at the worshipers of Good Soil Lutheran Ministries. The youngest among them was 6 weeks old; the oldest was 90. To the pastor, it represented "the fullness of a healthy community."

Born from the consolidation of Faith and Our Savior's—both ELCA congregations 2 miles apart in suburban Cleveland, Ohio—**Good Soil is a new congregation that receives funding through Mission Support.**

Rollenhagen was originally called to Faith in 2011. In 2016, Our Savior's contracted with Faith to share his ministry.

Sharing a pastor intensified discernment in both congregations on whether to consolidate. The two churches began joint worship in 2016 on Pentecost Sunday.

At the 2017 ELCA Newly Organized Congregation Gathering, also funded by Mission Support, Rollenhagen and three members met leaders from other congregations who are being church in new ways. One speaker, Fred Nelson, served a growing two-campus congregation in Illinois.

"For us, it gave support to the idea that you can be a two-campus church and grow," Rollenhagen said.

On Feb. 1, 2018, Faith and Our Savior's merged to become Good Soil Lutheran Ministries. Rollenhagen said the name reflects the purpose—not "to prop up two small congregations" but to "strengthen and expand" Lutheran ministry in greater Cleveland.

Faith and Our Savior's are now two campuses of Good Soil Lutheran Ministries, with worship held at each during alternate weeks.

Members and guests were reminded of the new schedule through signage on both buildings; maps and schedules are posted online.

"The biggest challenge was for people to grow beyond the identities of Faith and Our Savior's," Rollenhagen said. But he thinks worshiping together Sunday after Sunday has aided in this transition.

Attendance has grown, with younger families.

"The energy is being directed toward living into the future instead of trying to save the past," Rollenhagen said.

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