

Sherburne County Area Catholic Community All Things New Proposal

The Sherburne County Area Catholic Community (ACC)—including Mary of the Visitation, St. Marcus, Christ Our Light, and St. Andrew's Parishes—proposes two phased plans to consolidate worship sites and merge parish corporations for Mary of the Visitation and St. Marcus. This initiative aims to ensure sustainability and improve pastoral care and resource stewardship.

Becker Becomes the Primary Church for Mary of the Visitation and a phased merger with St Marcus as a partner church

Becker will serve as the main church. St. Marcus will merge with MOTV (Extinctive union) and function as a partner church for the Sherburne County ACC subset (MOTV and St Marcus), while Christ our Light and St Andrews remain separate corporations. This proposal outlines our plan to meet guidelines, support parish growth, improve collaboration, and create a welcoming environment by aligning resources, schedules, and facilities for long-term sustainability.

Accessibility to Sunday Mass

20 Minute Drive to Mass

- The two corporations include the Mary of the Visitation parish, Becker and Big Lake campus, and St. Marcus parish in Clear Lake. The Becker campus is centrally positioned among the three sites, making it accessible to at least 80% of the parish members. The Becker campus accommodates approximately 450 people, St. Marcus accommodates approximately 300 people.

All Sunday masses are well attended, especially MOTV's 10:00 a.m. Sunday Mass which gathers around four hundred participants. The large number of participants is credited to the new Faith Formation program, *Revive*. Youth sessions are held directly after Mass at the Becker campus. St. Marcus averages 230 attendees at 70% capacity. Both Parishes also meet the 25% operating expense limit.

Mass Schedule

- As primary church, Becker, will celebrate two weekend masses with one mass celebrated at the partner church, St. Marcus. Daily mass will be offered at both sites.

Budgeted Ministries

ACC Business Administrator

- The *All-Things New* binder states that ACCs with over 3,000 households do not need a single business administrator; our ACC has over 3,000 households. Christ our Light and St Andrew both have parish administrators on staff as well as a pastoral associate at each location. Given our situation, for at least the near future, MOTV plans to employ their own as well. As time progresses, the parish will continue to assess and make changes regarding a business administrator.

Faith Formation

- Revive Faith Formation began at MOTV in October 2025 to boost spiritual growth and further the Church's evangelization, discipleship, and community aim. This proposal includes plans to collaborate with St Marcus in the sharing of information and training regarding *Revive*. St. Marcus will assess the *Revive* program, then consider options for Faith Formation after the merger. Sharing resources regarding the Faith Formation Ministry will help enhance outreach to our youth as well as hopes in providing valuable sharing and learning opportunities with the parents at MOTV and St. Marcus.

Social Outreach

- Supported ministries at Mary of the Visitation and St. Marcus will continue to be supported, sharing when possible. St. Marcus facilities are also used by members of the community, including the Cub Scouts, Red Cross Blood Drives, and Clear Lake Lions Annual Fish Fry during Lent. After the merger, all social outreach programs will be unified to serve all three communities efficiently. This will strengthen our impact, enhance collaboration, and maintain support for every community.

Pastoral Care

- Mary of the Visitation and St. Marcus has a strong emphasis on Pastoral Care within the Central Minnesota Community at large. The Pastor provides sacramental and spiritual care opening and lovingly, while our area Deacons provide support where the Pastor may need additional help. Our staff and parishioners provide services to local food shelves, prison inmates, homebound, and elderly confined to Nursing Homes. Those services will continue and potentially grow when campuses are consolidated and pastor administrative responsibilities reduced.

Hispanic Ministries

- While the Hispanic communities within Big Lake, Becker, and Clear Lake are not large enough to celebrate a dedicated Mass, there is support set aside for support for local Hispanic families and St. Andrew's Parish does offer a Mass each weekend in Spanish.

Priests/Pastors

Pastoral Ministry

- Reducing to one corporation will allow the pastor to spend at least 50% of his time on pastoral ministries. Reducing the pastoral burden is central to our plans for the Sherburne County ACC sub-set (Mary of the Visitation and St. Marcus). We propose consolidating, assigning Mass times, and moving to a single corporation by 2027 to ease priests' workload and ensure he has the necessary support and resources. Though the cities are close, limited time prevents the pastor from greeting parishioners, finishing post-Mass duties, preparing for upcoming service, and traveling between locations. Minnesota's winter weather and a train crossing on Highway 10 can further delay travel, making timely arrival at Becker uncertain.
- At Mary of the Visitation, Pastoral Council members function as liaisons to committees for consistent communication. They submit monthly reports, keeping the pastor informed without his required attendance at each meeting.

Masses

- We will continue to have three weekend Masses: One mass at St. Marcus, and two Masses at Becker, as established on July 1, 2025 when MOTV began sharing a pastor with St. Marcus.

Desire for the priest to live in a community within the ACC. ● The Becker location includes a rectory within walking distance of the church, providing convenient housing for the pastor. The property is in good condition with a new roof and updated appliances such as a water heater, dishwasher, and washing machine. Keeping the pastor at this address minimizes the need for relocation or increased maintenance.

Buildings

Occupancy

- As of July 1, 2025, when St. Marcus began sharing a Pastor with MOTV, all masses are well attended and exceed the 50% occupancy requirement at a rate of 65-70%. Due to maintaining St. Marcus as a partner church, we anticipate that mass counts will stay relatively the same depending on decisions made by the parishioners to remain at MOTV and St. Marcus after the transition.

Building Accessibility

- St. Marcus and MOTV Becker/Big Lake have no issues regarding building accessibility. Becker, built as a single level church, is fully accessible with a single-level entrance and ADA push-button doors, making it convenient for seniors, families with babies, and people with mobility issues. St. Marcus and MOTV Big Lake have fully functioning elevators to all levels. The dining hall at MOTV Big Lake is located in the basement while the dining hall at St. Marcus is located on the 1st level of the new addition.

Building Use and Repurposing

- Starting July 1, 2026, a Property Evaluation Committee will be established under parish leadership to assess uses for Big Lake properties, explore fundraising for transition costs, and evaluate leasing, repurposing, or selling options per diocesan guidelines with cost analysis for each decision.
- MOTV has two campuses: Big Lake (church, adjoining lots, youth house (formerly the rectory located on a separate property) and Becker (church, youth house, rectory).

Currently, the Becker Church's seating capacity has been able to accommodate parishioners from MOTV and St. Marcus on the weekends when Mass is celebrated at Becker. With St. Marcus functioning as a partner church, the mass counts are projected to remain relatively stable and most likely will not require the Becker site to immediately consider a building project to add more square footage.

A Property Evaluation Committee will be established by the pastor to determine the best strategy to sell all the Big Lake property, including the church, parking lot, hockey rink, and baseball field currently being leased by the city of Big Lake. After the merge is complete, the merged parish committee will also follow the same procedure to evaluate the selling of the St. Marcus youth house and potential sale or repurposing of the rectory and church.

- The Big Lake youth house (formerly a rectory) is currently used by students in grades 3–12 and adult groups. The Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and Property Evaluation Committee will evaluate its use and consider its sale, estimated at \$400,000. The Property Evaluation Committee will work with the other groups to determine if or when this portion of the property will be sold.
- St. Marcus will continue to work on decreasing its already low operating costs by selling the youth house, continue to provide office space for staff at Clear Lake, and work within The Property Evaluation Committee to evaluate the viability of the Rectory to be sold or function as a retreat for men considering a vocation to the priesthood.
- All MOTV staff will move to the Becker campus by July 1, 2026. Becker has enough space for everyone and will save costs by eliminating duplicate equipment and supplies. This move also ensures a regular staff presence at the main church for parishioner support and daily operations.
- Once the Big Lake campus is sold and consistent data is collected on new mass counts and operating costs, the Property Evaluation Committee with other parish groups will evaluate if the Becker church building or Becker Youth House needs expansion to support Sherburne County's anticipated annual 4% growth.

Finances

- Currently, MOTV and St. Marcus parishes meet the 25% operating expense limit. However, this plan will serve to improve the operating budget by eliminating some portions of the properties that contribute to the overall operating cost at St. Marcus and MOTV Big Lake.

Timeline

July 1, 2026

- Becker will become the primary Church location for MOTV.
- There will be two Masses offered at Becker and one Mass at St. Marcus.
- A Property Evaluation Committee will be established to determine which pieces of property will be sold at Big as well as the sale of the youth house at St. Marcus and/or repurposed to accommodate these proposed changes.
- The Property Evaluation Committee will work with other committees in the parish to review the proper use of the Youth House in Big Lake. These committees will decide on plans to either continue as a youth and adult ministry facility or to be sold.
- The Revive curriculum will be shared and training offered to St Marcus Faith Formation as a means of sharing resources.
- All staff members from MOTV will relocate to the Becker campus.

July 1, 2027

- St Marcus Parish and Mary of the Visitation Parish will merge (extinctive union) and will maintain mass schedules, integrate staff, prepare canonical decrees, transfer assets and liabilities, and align parish registers.
- After the merger is completed, St. Marcus will become a partner church with MOTV Becker functioning as the primary church. One mass will continue to be offered at St. Marcus and Becker will offer two masses each weekend.
- St. Marcus church staff may maintain current offices, but will be offered office space at MOTV, Becker. Bulletins, websites, and all parish communications will be centralized to encourage collaboration, better communication, and a unified mission.

After the merger, the unified parish will serve as one of three pillars in our Sherburne County ACC. The timeline allows for organized planning and smooth integration of finances, records, ministries, and parish identities.