

EMS Case Study *Willow Creek Community Church, IL*



A Village Within Itself

Located 35 miles northwest of downtown Chicago, the village of South Barrington, Illinois is home to 3,800 residents. An integral part of the greater Barrington area, Willow Creek Community Church is a “village” within itself. The church brings 16,000 people together each weekend for services, ministries and activities. The services, which combine prayer, drama and multi-media, have been inspiring members and visitors alike for more than 25 years.

Beginning in the 1970s as a new way to address the social and spiritual issues facing high school students, the innovative services had an attendance that quickly grew to 1,000 teens each night. The youth ministry eventually moved from South Park Church, its original home, to rented space in the Willow Creek Movie Theater in Palatine, Illinois. There it continued to offer services to students as well as a growing adult audience. Finally in 1977, with 2,000 attendees, the Willow Creek congregation bought 90 acres of farmland to construct a building of their own. An additional 65 acres was purchased soon thereafter to accommodate the building’s expansion to a total of more than 80 rooms and meeting spaces.

While increasing its membership has never been Willow Creek’s goal, its genuine and reverent message continues to draw increasing numbers of

people to its doors. In order to help attendees retain the sense of belonging and community that smaller congregations have, the church offers a variety of small group opportunities for people “to develop spiritually while building life-long friendships.” The church hosts approximately 500 events each week as it works diligently to address the diverse needs and interests of its membership.

Custom-Designed Software and Double-Bookings

Initially, Willow Creek did all of its event scheduling using a custom-designed program. For the most part, the program served its purpose and helped facilities scheduler, Bob Furlan, put events and activities in rooms appropriate to their needs and

Fast Facts

- Replaces erratic scheduling program with EMS Enterprise; creates **dependable** scheduling process
- **16,000** attendees
- More than **80** rooms and meeting spaces
- **500** events each week

EMS Case Study *Willow Creek Community Church, IL*

reserve the necessary equipment. However, conflicts were common. “We would try to schedule an event and the associated resources,” describes Furlan, “only to find out later that we had double-booked the room and did not have enough equipment.”

These scheduling issues added to the stress of a busy calendar that includes entries for ministry activities, group meetings, a wide range of athletic events, food services, seminars and guest speakers. Additionally, the custom program did not allow for Willow Creek to analyze past event volumes as a means of planning for future activity. With a rapidly growing congregation and a large facility to manage, it was important to the church to be able to prepare for upcoming events including the purchasing of resources and the reserving of staff for those events.

Far Beyond Basic Room Scheduling

Willow Creek Community Church needed a scheduling program as dynamic and progressive as the church itself - a software package capable of handling the church’s room and vehicle scheduling both easily and accurately. Furlan also wanted the program to track the church’s equipment inventory and handle the time-consuming task of billing for their in-house food service program.

With these factors in mind, Willow Creek began a software search that culminated in their purchase of EMS Professional. More recently they have

upgraded to EMS Enterprise, an even more powerful and comprehensive room and resource scheduling system.

“EMS helps us organize the chaos.”

Not only does the church have a mind-boggling number of events to plan and rooms to manage, but, as Furlan explains, “We have a lot of change that happens here, especially last minute changes to events. With EMS, creating, changing or duplicating entire events is simple, freeing up time that our staff uses to complete other tasks.”

As Willow Creek has discovered, EMS’s capabilities go far beyond basic room scheduling. A variety of event scheduling “wizards,” operational reports and integration with Microsoft® products (including email) take much of the legwork out of managing events. Standard statistical reports and the ability to write custom reports against the EMS database enable Willow Creek to evaluate facility and resource usage in order to plan intelligently for the future. In short, as Furlan puts it, “EMS helps us to organize the chaos.”

For more information on Dean Evans & Associates, and the company’s event management and master calendaring software products, go to www.dea.com or contact the Sales department at sales@dea.com or 1.800.440.3994 ext. 863.

