

The following is a phonetic reading of the [YouTube Video:](#)
NEXT/Week 1/New Public Spaces—Dave Dummitt
Willow Creek Community Church, February 15, 2021
By Mary Fairchild mairlady.com . All emphasis mine.

Well man, I love what Albert pointed out. Sometimes as Christians we can become salt inside, beautiful salt shakers but that's not what salt is made for. Man, that's not what we're made for. **We ought to be seeking out ways that we can constantly be, you know, rubbing shoulders with people in our community.** Meeting them where they are. **When we're left to our own devices we we tend to drift towards those who look like us, or believe like us and we're going to have to be intentional, you know, mixing things up to be with people who are different than we are.**

The heartbeat of Willow has always been to do anything we can to reach people who are far from God. We've got a rich history of being people who break down barriers, innovate, think forward to meet people where they are so they can experience God's love in practical ways.

You know the message of the Gospel, it hasn't changed, but the way people interact and connect that has changed. The ways people shop, even the ways people work, it's all changed. And, and this global pandemic has only sped up those changes.

So, Willow, what would it look like for us as a church to be on the front lines of innovating all these places where we connect with people? What would it look like to create a new public space to meet people right where they are? We asked the same question at my last church. And we bought a building and we put out a sign that said "coming soon you decide." And, a , people from the community texted in ideas for what they wanted in their community center. And we basically created a modern day watering hole where people could come together all week long for sports and fitness or or coffe and food or, or meeting spaces, or playscape, or or school for the arts. It was just all kinds of things happening there all week long. And my church wasn't the only one.

Across the country churches have started to see new life and new opportunities to bless their communities and reach people by transforming their facilities into community use spaces. Churches are dialing into the stewardship of their facilities, too, cuz listen if we're paying to heat and cool and maintain these facilities seven days a week, well, we ought to use them beyond just the weekend.(2:26)

Take a look at this: (video of his 2/42 church facility during the week) Isn't that amazing? **Churches using their facilities to create a modern day well to bring people together to create interactions. Places where the church (3:07) building is used for more than just a few hours on the weekend and a place where we no longer go to church but we get to be the church sharing workspace, play space,gathering space to be with our community.**

Generations Church in Trinity, Florida, check this out: (video). They found a unique way to make this possible. They've actually partnered with local restaurants, childcare facilities, fitness centers and more to create an entire community-centered campus. It's amazing. Ah, here's another one, Christ Church of the Valley in Arizona. They offer sports programs that host 15,000 youth participants every year. And get this, 70% of them are not connected to a local church but they found a safe, engaging space—a community in this facility that the church uses for worship on the weekends.

First Baptist Church in Houston, they run a fitness and recreation center open to the public and here's

what the director says, “that every time someone steps foot in our facility that's an opportunity for ministry.” I love that.

Here's one, Harvest Church in Billings, Montana—they needed a new worship center and as they were beginning to make plans and raise their money they realized there was even a greater need. Their community overwhelmingly wanted a water park for their kids but because of political issues it kept getting voted down. So Harvest Church scrapped their plans for a worship center and raised money for a water park for the community. (4:42) And the city ended up giving them seven acres of land, sold it to them for a dollar. And Harvest built Oasis and continues to run it for the community. Man, I'm telling you interactions are happening at that place. People are taking their next steps with God because that church thought outside the box.

Here at Willow we're starting to re-imagine what each of our locations could look like by turning them and facing them outward to our community. We're starting to ask really fun questions like “how could our buildings be transformed into being a gift to our community—gifts to the people that we love, not just Christ followers, but everybody?”(5:21)

And I want to show you a few, just, ideas—places that we're dreaming. Now, keep in mind as you see these, uh, this is just the beginning. We're just dreaming about what could be these aren't set plans but you can just imagine the possibilities. Check this out (pictures). Picture a place where families can connect. One thing I love here is this idea of bringing the outside in. You've got kids you know that in the middle of Winter in Chicago—man to have a safe place indoors where they can play. It'd just be amazing and to gift that to our community.. But, but, but what if that play area was near shared work spaces, or what if we had fields available for sports leagues to play? We could have spaces for people to meet and catch up or do a Bible study. Or meet friends for coffee while the kids run around and they're entertained and hey, grandparents this isn't just for the ... grandparents you ever want to have the kids over to play but thought man they've got so much energy. Well you can take them to a place like this and just have a ball.

Hey, COVID has completely changed the way we work. (6:35). Turns out many of us can do our jobs remotely, **what if we provided multi-use space that allows people to work remotely, but together in community.** You drop off the kids at a preschool, maybe get a workout in at the fitness facility, both on site—and then you work on site. All of it on one place. Here's a fun one, what if instead of going down the stairs to church we had a playscape so that on Sundays kids could slide into church. You wouldn't have to convince them to come they'd be begging you.

All right, now all that's pretty pictures—it's ideas with you know nothing firm nothing in place yet but **Willow we are dreaming of ways that our facilities can become gifts to our communities. And when it comes to reaching people far from God, community spaces allow people to feel welcomed, wanted and seen long before they ever attend a church service.** And when life happens, like it does, a crisis hits or maybe just a you know Easter rolls around and somebody says, “you know maybe we oughta check out a church.” Guess what? They've probably already been in ours. Maybe they were there for coffee or there for a music lesson or there to meet a client for work. They've already been in the space and so they feel safe to come and check out a weekend service.

All right we're talking about new public spaces and buildings are definitely a big part of that(8:04) but do you know what's even more public than our buildings? It's our digital spaces. It's online. It's the internet. And you know Amazon and Walmart, Disney they're major companies that are making big shifts to cater to customers in both their brick and mortar locations but also their online spheres as well.

And guys if companies are leveraging modern technology to drive sales well then the church ought to be doing (8:31) everything we can to leverage our spaces online as well.

You wanna hear something fun? Our Casa de Luz family has been able to experience church with family members and friends in different countries because we've been focusing online allowing them to connect and worship together online all at the same time. **Here at Willow we're working to hold innovation labs, think tanks with people from some of the most cutting edge companies in Chicagoland and together we're asking questions, we're sharing best practices. Different disciplines, different backgrounds coming together to explore explore ways that we can think online—think forward online together. (9:16)**

And one exciting opportunity is the the launch of rightnow MEDIA. Think of it as Netflix for Jesus. You know some of our campuses have been leveraging for awhile now but we want to expand access to this for everyone who calls Willow Creek home. You'll be able to access Bible study content from some of the most renowned Bible teachers in the world. Kids shows, daily devotions, kids resources all of it available to you at anytime wherever you are and **we're going to create one unified online weekend stream that will bring together the best of all seven of our campuses into one engaging weekly online experience.(10:01)**

Well, you know we've talked about what's next with new public spaces—big building with thousands of people in mind and the potential to reach millions of people digitally, but I just want you to know I can't wait to talk to you **next week about getting more personal—about the “E” of NEXT. About how we can care for and develop the people here at our church and how we can personally mobilize the people of our church to love their neighbor and change the world.**