

See You at the Pole Marks 20 Years of School Prayer

✖ Some 2 million students are expected to gather around their school flagpoles Wednesday morning for the 20th annual See You at the Pole event.

Youth from elementary age through college will pray for their schools, communities and nation at student-led events that leaders hope will serve as a springboard for a national spiritual awakening.

“Historically, youth have been at the forefront of moral and spiritual awakening in our country,” said Doug Clark, director for field ministries for the National Network of Youth Ministries and a spokesman for See You at the Pole (SYATP).

He pointed to the Haystack prayer meetings at Williams College in 1806, which Clark said spawned one of the most significant missions movements in the history of the church.

“I really believe that when students come and there’s the kind of surrender that we often see at See You at the Pole—and they’re not just there to make a show and they’re not there to pray in front of their friends, but they’re there seeking the heart of God for their campus—that God’s going to move on some of these groups and do some amazing things,” Clark said.

Clark said the student-led prayer gathering typically kicks off student-led outreach efforts for the school year.

“Consistently, See You at the Pole is the beginning of students coming together as the body of Christ on their campus to launch a year of ministry,” he said. “If See You at the Pole is just an event, then really it’s of questionable value because it’s so much more important that they see their campus as a mission field and look throughout the entire year of

ministering to their friends.”

Clark said in the 20 years since SYATP was founded, the number of student-led campus ministries have exploded. He attributes that partly to the prayer effort and to a greater awareness among school administrators of students’ First Amendment rights to express their faith at school.

Although battles over church-state separation still rage within public schools, he believes the climate has improved for student-led school prayer in the last 20 years. In 1991, a year after SYATP launched, an Illinois student was arrested for praying on her high school campus. The following year, several Texas students were told they would be disciplined for praying around their flagpole, which later led to legal action.

Since then he said both the American Civil Liberties Union and the Department of Education have affirmed SYATP as an acceptable expression of religious and free speech. He said the battleground has shifted to who is allowed to pray—parents, teachers, faculty—and how student-led ministry events can be promoted on campuses.

“But the good news is in the last 20 years, it became really clear that students are perfectly within their rights to pray on campus,” he said, “and we’ve just had less and less of an issue.”

Clark said students have come to Christ after walking past their peers in prayer. But he noted that participation in SYATP and student-led outreaches has leveled in recent years, and he’d like to see more youth ministries encourage students to see their campuses as a mission field.

“We hope that See You at the Pole serves the purpose of spreading vision, of giving hope, of raising the awareness of the potential for revival and awakening in our country,” Clark said. “Of understanding the junior high and high school [and]

college campuses as mission fields that are white unto harvest."