

Prayer Event Sparks Visually Impaired Youth Ministry

The dust has settled, so to speak, on See You at the Pole (SYATP). Millions of students gathered at their schools' flagpole to pray—including 25 students from the Illinois School of the Visually Impaired (ISVI), in Jacksonville, Ill.

With a student population of 75, this was 33 percent of the school in attendance for the first SYATP was held on its campus.

Fernando Jimenez, a visually impaired senior and a regular attendee of the youth ministry at Jacksonville Assembly of God, organized this year's SYATP at ISVI. Jimenez, who started attending ISVI last year, was the first student from the school to also start attending youth services at Jacksonville AG, and has invited friends to come as well.

"It was awesome to see a student get in there and do something that hasn't been done before, especially something like SYATP," says Josh Tattershall, youth pastor at Jacksonville AG.

Since the SYATP event, a few ISVI students have started attending youth services, along with a few students who had attended before. Currently, six students from ISVI are regulars, and several of them serve in various capacities, such as closing the service in prayer, taking prayer requests and running the sound booth or projectors.

"We are excited to see what God is doing in the lives of students at ISVI," says Tattershall, who has served as youth pastor for the past year. "I never knew that we would have students from the school doing ministry in our group."

Since the SYATP event, Tattershall requested a copy of the

Braille *Book of Hope* from the Center for the Blind to give to an ISVI student that recently attended youth service. Though students have Bibles, they can read the *Book of Hope* as supplement to the Scripture, Tattershall says. The *Book of Hope* contains the text of the four Gospels and documents the life of Christ from conception to ascension.

While Tattershall didn't intentionally establish a special needs ministry, the students are thriving in his youth services. "Myself, my students and staff just love them, support them and talk to them about their lives. Other than the fact that they are visually impaired, they're just normal students like everyone else."

Tattershall plans to use a focus group in the upcoming months to determine what youth members have a passion for and help them use their passion in ministry. "I am trying to get every student involved," says Tattershall. "It's definitely a work in progress, but hopefully they will really start to plug-in to ministry."