

Night to Shine's Success Inspires Church to Plan Bigger 2025 Event

New Covenant United Methodist Church in The Villages will host the celebration for the second time Feb. 7.

By JAMES DINAN | Daily Sun Senior Writer

New Covenant United Methodist Church held its first-ever Night to Shine event in February, bringing 100 honored guests, 100 prom buddies and 120 parents and caregivers to the church for an evening of fun.

Now, the church is starting work on its next Night to Shine, a prom-night experience for people who are 14 and older with special needs, sponsored by the Jacksonville-based Tim Tebow Foundation.

"This year's event went so well that we were immediately interested in doing it again," said Olivia Collins, student minister at New

Covenant UMC. "And next year's Night to Shine will be bigger than ever."

The 2025 edition, 5 to 9 p.m. Feb. 7 at the church, increases to 120 honored guests.

"We can't wait to get going," Collins said.

Those interested in helping make the night special can attend a volunteer meeting from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Sept. 17, or watch via livestream.

A church member is to credit for putting Night to Shine on the church's radar.

"We learned about Night to Shine through a church

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Amy J. Correnti | Daily Sun

Isabella Laporta, left, dances down the red carpet with her buddy, Reese Ponds, during the Night to Shine event Feb. 9 at New Covenant United Methodist Church.

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to Shine through a church congregant who attended previous Night to Shines with her sister, who has special needs," said the Rev. Donna Hendren, New Covenant UMC's visitation pastor. "Our church has an Agape small group for people with special needs that we are looking to grow and promote. What better way to do that than by bringing Night to Shine to our church?"

The local event is part of a global reach. In 2024, around 700 Night to Shine experiences happened at churches in more than 50 countries on six continents. Each Night to Shine event is unique, but common elements of the evening include limousine rides, a red carpet walk,

professional photos, dancing, corsages, boutonnières and a catered dinner.

Every guest of honor brings a parent or caregiver and is assigned a "buddy" for the evening. A guest's buddy is a volunteer who accompanies the guest for the evening and encourages them to participate, while the parents and caregivers are whisked away for their own special time of pampering, including dinner.

And the highlight of the evening comes when every one of the Night to Shine honored guests is crowned a king or queen of the prom.

"Night to Shine is what the church is trying to do — shower the love of Jesus on all," Hendren said.

For 2025, Collins said the church plans to open registration for honored

guests starting Sept. 17. And in addition to the need for volunteers, New Covenant UMC is looking for sponsors to make next year's Night to Shine the best one yet. Last year's event saw 19 local and regional sponsors assisting the church.

"We are sincerely grateful to our major sponsors and businesses who have donated monetary and in-kind donations to make our first Tim Tebow Night to Shine prom possible," Collins said.

New Covenant United Methodist Church is at 3470 Woodridge Drive in The Villages. For more information on Night to Shine and to learn how to be a volunteer, visit ncumcfl.com/nts.

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