

Pastors to Preach Barefoot on Easter Sunday

✖ This Easter, when many churchgoers sport new suits and dresses, pastors across the country will be preaching with one article of clothing noticeably absent: their shoes.

Some 5,000 pastors are expected to go barefoot on Easter Sunday to raise awareness about global poverty and help provide shoes for the 300 million people worldwide who lack them.

Photo: Samaritan's Feet founder Manny Ohonme

Sponsored by Samaritan's Feet, a North Carolina-based ministry that has collected 3 million pairs of shoes to distribute worldwide, the Barefoot Sunday campaign was announced today in Atlanta. The event falls on the 42nd anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death and will honor the civil rights leader's legacy. His children, Martin Luther King III and the Rev. Bernice A. King, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, will be among those going barefoot April 4.

"My father stood for the impoverished and Samaritan's Feet embodies that every day," Martin Luther King III said in a statement. "This fits the model that my father stood for, and we are honored to continue his legacy."

Bishop

Paul S. Morton, head of the Full Gospel Baptist Church, will be preaching shoeless on Easter, and he expects 2,500 affiliated pastors to join him in supporting the campaign.

Other participants include: Stephen J. Thurston, president of the National Baptist Convention of America; Bishop James Ingram, presiding prelate of the 10th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Michigan pastor J. Drew Sheard, a bishop-elect in the Church of God in Christ; and the Rev. Raphael Warnock, pastor of King's former congregation, Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

"When our Savior rose from the grave, He was barefoot," Morton stated. "I am no better than anyone else, and that's why I am so proud to be a part of this endeavor. What an honor to join my colleagues in a collective effort to reach millions for Christ on Easter Sunday."

The Barefoot Sunday service kicks off a 10-month campaign to generate enough money to distribute 1 million pairs of shoes worldwide, including in the U.S. In addition to preaching barefoot, the pastors will ask church members to give \$10 to support shoe distributions.

The initiative will culminate with shoe distribution events in 50 cities nationwide on Martin Luther King's birthday weekend in January.

“This is a dream come true to be able to partner with Bernice and Martin Luther King III and these great religious leaders,” said Manny Ohonme, founder of Samaritan’s Feet and a Pentecostal minister. “These pastors are making a choice to preach barefoot. The children we serve don’t have a choice to be barefoot. By preaching in their bare feet, it makes a statement to their congregation that they are not above these hurting families.”

Ohonme, a native of Nigeria who received his first pair of shoes at age 9, launched Samaritan’s Feet in 2003. The movement gained national attention in 2007 when Ron Hunter, head basketball coach at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, agreed to coach a game barefoot to raise awareness about the global need for shoes. The campaign generated 40,000 pairs of shoes, and since then more than 3,000 coaches have coached games barefoot to raise money for the ministry.

During shoe giveaways, which have been held across the U.S. and in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Middle East, volunteers wash the recipients’ feet and anoint them with oil to demonstrate both humility and service.

In October, the Detroit Pistons partnered with Samaritan’s Feet for a shoe giveaway in their city. And in 2008, *Inside the NBA* hosts Ernie Johnson, Charles Barkley

and Kenny Smith went barefoot during a Mother's Day broadcast to raise awareness about the group's mission.

Ohonme said Easter is a perfect time for churchgoers to remember the poor "because it's really about putting a face to our faith."

"We were trying is to use that platform [of Easter Sunday] to be able to bring about an opportunity for people to be able to tangibly translate that hope to folks that are living in hopeless situations, to be able to inspire and encourage them that here is hope and that Christ has given us that hope," Ohonme said. "The way we can demonstrate that hope is by tangibly modeling and showing compassion. You may not be able to change the entire world, but you can impact one person."

Information on participating in the Barefoot Sunday campaign can be found at the Samaritan's Feet Web site.