

Samaritan's Feet Founder Brings Gift Full Circle

Emmanuel "Manny" Ohonme seeks to do with shoes what Jesus did with fish. His mission in life is to multiply the love that came with a gift of shoes. He was a 9-year-old boy living in poverty when a Christian missionary came to Nigeria, put shoes on his feet and told him he was somebody.

That message reverberates through Samaritan's Feet International, the nonprofit organization Ohonme founded. "You are not here by accident," he told Memphis children. "You are here to become somebody."

Ohonme related how the gift of shoes to a barefoot boy, who traversed roads littered with broken glass and sharp rocks, helped transform his life. He shared how the kind words to the son of an alcoholic father gave that boy hope. And he told how the boy worked hard to become a successful athlete, scholar and businessman because he was somebody.

Ohonme shared his story at the **Memphis Athletic Ministries Grizzlies Center** on Thursday evening, then spoke Friday morning to the Lipscomb & Pitts Breakfast Club. He came to Memphis at the invitation of Smith & Nephew.

As one of the sponsors of the popular Breakfast Club series, the orthopedic device company selects one speaker a year. Dave Carlson, director of internal communications and community relations for Smith & Nephew, said he initially wanted to bring in someone to talk about innovation. That changed when he read a short biography about Ohonme. "His story is so unique it touched me," Carlson said.

Ohonme came to the United States in 1989 on a basketball scholarship and played for the University of North Dakota.

Smith & Nephew also arranged for the appearance at **Memphis Athletic Ministries'** facility on Ball Road, which is the same neighborhood as the company's Brooks Road facility. "We just thought it was a perfect match," Carlson said.

The visit was not Ohonme's first to Memphis. He has been working with the Grizzlies on charity initiatives since 2008. Ohonme often works with basketball players and coaches to promote his charity. "This coming January on Martin Luther King Day we are actually kicking up a major national calling initiative called the MLK National Day of Service in 43 cities across America, in which Memphis is going to be one of them," he said. "We are going to be impacting a minimum of 500 kids in each of those of markets."

Since the founding of the charity in 2003, Ohonme has given shoes to almost 3 million children. His goal is to distribute 10 million shoes over the next 10 years. The charity works in 60 countries across the world.

It all began with a gift of shoes from a missionary from Wisconsin named Dave. One of the children asked him if he had ever seen the missionary again. "I hope some day I will," he said. "If I don't see him here, maybe some day I will see him in heaven."

To learn more about the charity, visit www.samaritansfeet.org. - *Tom Wilemon*