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## Group marches from Capitol to church in honor of King

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Two local traditions were combined for the first time Sunday during the annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration.

The Ministerial Alliance of Springfield's annual Martin Luther King Jr. observance service, held at Union Baptist Church, 1405 E. Monroe St., became the destination for the University of Illinois Springfield's march in honor of King.

The Rev. Wesley McNeese, president of the ministerial alliance, said offerings from the service would benefit aid in Haiti.

"We're using our offering this evening for Haiti relief, so we're going to have to identify an agency to get the money there," he said. "We're definitely behind them."

The services honor King, who would have turned 81 last week had he not been assassinated in Memphis in 1968.

Marcellus Leonard, a professor emeritus at the university, said the college's march began back around 1989 or 1990.

"I thought I'd bring the two events together," he said. "For a couple of years now there wasn't a march, and since I have an interest in both the university and the Springfield Ministerial Alliance, I thought this would be a wonderful opportunity to cooperate and do one significant thing in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, who is of my generation."

The march began at Second Street and Capitol Avenue, where the University of Illinois Springfield's Voices in Praise Choir performed in front of a statue of Martin Luther King Jr. before about 40 people walked toward Union Baptist Church, where the annual service was held.

Nicholas Stojakovich, director of Hope in Action-Springfield, said he believed Sunday's activities were a reminder that much remains to be done to improve race relations.

"I'm personally delighted...to march in honor of the legacy of Dr. King and what he stood for in this country — a passionate advocate for social justice and it comes at a time in our nation's history in which, while there's been enormous progress in the area of race relations, we continue to contend with the issue of race."

Stojakovich said he was also bothered by the disproportionate levels of unemployment based on race.

"I'm really concerned about the high levels of unemployment that exist within African American communities," he said. "While the national unemployment rate is 10 percent, you have over 20 percent of African Americans who can't find jobs."

Rhys Saunders can be reached at 788-1521.

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