

'We have to scratch where the people itch'

King Solomon program offers tools for living

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"Get ready for your blessing. Get ready for your miracle."

King Solomon Baptist members clap their hands and march down the aisle, shaking a tambourine.

The message in the song is evident: King Solomon is joyful and alive. It's also dedicated to addressing what the Rev. R.G. Bernard says are problems in the African-American community — "to help change individual by individual," he says.

Pastor Bernard, as he's called by his congregation, has decided to preach more than just the gospel from his Farmer Street pulpit. King Solomon is addressing the physical and emotional needs of the community.

Based on statistics he says he found through the Centers for Disease Control, "the African-American family is going to become extinct."

To drive his point home, last month, the church sponsored Black Family Weekend, which included an empowerment banquet, a family parade and an Easter morning worship service. The newspaper advertisement for the weekend's activities said:

- Approximately half of African-American pregnancies end in abortion.

- AIDS is the leading cause of death for African-American women between the ages of 25-34.

- African-American women have the highest rates of genital herpes infection, 48 percent.

- Over 70 percent of African-American children are born out of wedlock.

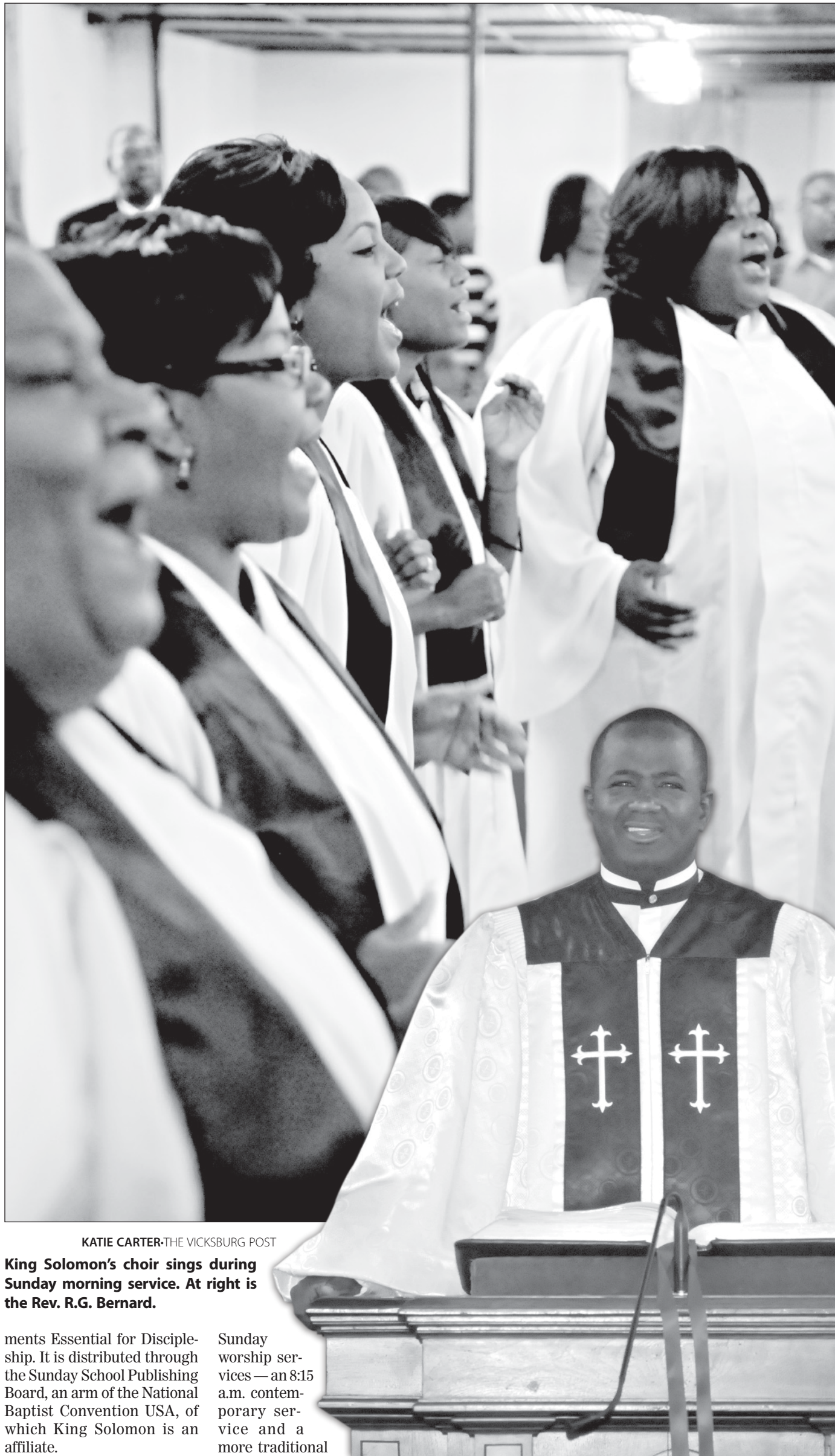
- Sexual immorality is killing African-American families.

The key, Bernard says, is "education, education, education; awareness, awareness, awareness. People don't seem to be aware of the facts listed in the newspaper. But when they do become aware, they think, 'Not my community, not my home, not my children.'"

But, he said, "The facts are it is in our community, it is in our home and it is our children."

Bernard continued, "Jesus Christ taught on these issues. When we obey God's rules, we are made whole — body, mind and spirit."

To further address social issues, the church is using a Sunday school program called "Discipleship Training," which follows literature called "Seed," or Spiritual Ele-



KATIE CARTER-THE VICKSBURG POST

King Solomon's choir sings during Sunday morning service. At right is the Rev. R.G. Bernard.

ments Essential for Discipleship. It is distributed through the Sunday School Publishing Board, an arm of the National Baptist Convention USA, of which King Solomon is an affiliate.

"Typical Sunday school literature was not meeting the needs," said Bernard. "We are an inner-city church. We have to scratch where the people itch."

King Solomon has two

Sunday worship services — an 8:15 a.m. contemporary service and a more traditional one at 10 a.m.

Afterward, dinner is served and anyone in the community is welcome.

The church spends at least \$20,000 on food every year, Bernard said. "Food is served

every Sunday — and some Wednesday nights. On Sundays, we are so large we have to eat in shifts."

The church is also in the

process of a building project. Having outgrown the Farmer Street location, they're working to construct a church at U.S. 61 North and Oak Ridge

Road.

King Solomon celebrated its 150th anniversary last year. Bernard is the church's 12th pastor, serving since 2003.



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