

Huge shoes to fill

Young nephew of Martin Luther King Jr. takes over church from community leader

By JAMES BASS

The Lumberton Robesonian

FAIRMONT (AP) — Growing up a relative of one of the most revered men in American history was not easy for the new pastor at First Baptist Church. And replacing the church's former pastor, a respected religious and political leader in Robeson County, was another challenge.

But the Rev. Vernon Christopher King, the nephew of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has been deterred by neither. King is nephew of the renowned civil rights leader who was gunned down on April 4, 1968. He replaced Dr. Joy Johnson as pastor of First Baptist Church in June. Johnson died in December.

"He is a blessing," says Hilda Hubbard, a lifelong member of the church. "He's young. He's energetic, and he brings an openness that we adore. I believe Dr. Johnson would have approved of our choice."

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"When you follow in the footsteps of any famous person, there is a lot of pressure," said King, 37.

"I was thinking about writing a book called 'In the Shadows of a Dream' about my experiences. There's admiration, but there's also jealousy too. It's unfair because people prejudge you without first getting to know you."

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uncle. Most of what he knows was learned through his family and what he has read.

"Once someone walked up to me and slapped me, so I hit him back," said King. "People said, 'Your uncle wouldn't do that,' and I would say 'I'm not my uncle.'"

Although Vernon King's life took a different turn than his uncle's, he studied religion at Morehouse College in Atlanta, as did his uncle. He and his uncle both served in administrative positions at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Vernon King makes about eight appearances a year at Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations. He has several cousins who work with him through the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Atlanta. But he says his real joy comes from his ministry.

"My dream is to do my part in creating what my uncle called a beloved community, to make it the best that it can be. I try to fulfill that vision. I try to keep people on the high road and have peace as much as possible. You could say I want to develop a holistic Christian community that is praise-oriented and more inclusive in worship."

He hopes to do more work with youths.

"I would like to be a teacher, perhaps on the college level," he said. "I like working with youth. One thing I am interested in is working with the juvenile system and teaching the non-violent philosophy of Dr. King. I always try to get across to young people that they have the opportunity to be even greater than

Like his uncle, who fought discrimination by peaceful demonstrations, King deplores violence.

"Violence is a cancer of the '90s. It's on the increase," said King. "It is alarming and scary. The youth of today don't feel that they fit into society. That's why they created rap music. They created their own communication. A lot of them feel they aren't loved. They have to know they are wanted and appreciated."

"I try to get youth to listen to the substance of rap. If it's demeaning to women or promoting violence, you don't need it. That whole life-style amazes me, how they think they can be a celebrity and a gangster at the same time. I mean, in the videos — the cars and the jewelry — they don't own it. It's just props in a video. We have to look at the real picture."

King is also a singer, having recently completed six contemporary and traditional gospel songs for an album to be released soon.

"I've been singing since I've been preaching. I really like doing contemporary renditions of classic songs," he said. "It's something that God gave me the talent to do, but I put more emphasis on the word."

King says he, his wife, Robin Scott, and their 9-month-old daughter, Victoria Chelsea, have been embraced by the community.

"Fairmont is a closely knit community. And even with its small population, there is a lot of diversity here," said King. "I'm grateful to be with a good church family that has been very supportive of me and my family."



The Rev. Vernon Christopher King stands outside the First Baptist Church.



Associated Press

The Rev. Vernon Christopher King stands outside the First Baptist Church in Fairmont. King is the nephew of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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Pastor follows uncle's footsteps

Martin Luther King Jr.'s nephew overcomes shadow

By JAMES BASS

Associated Press

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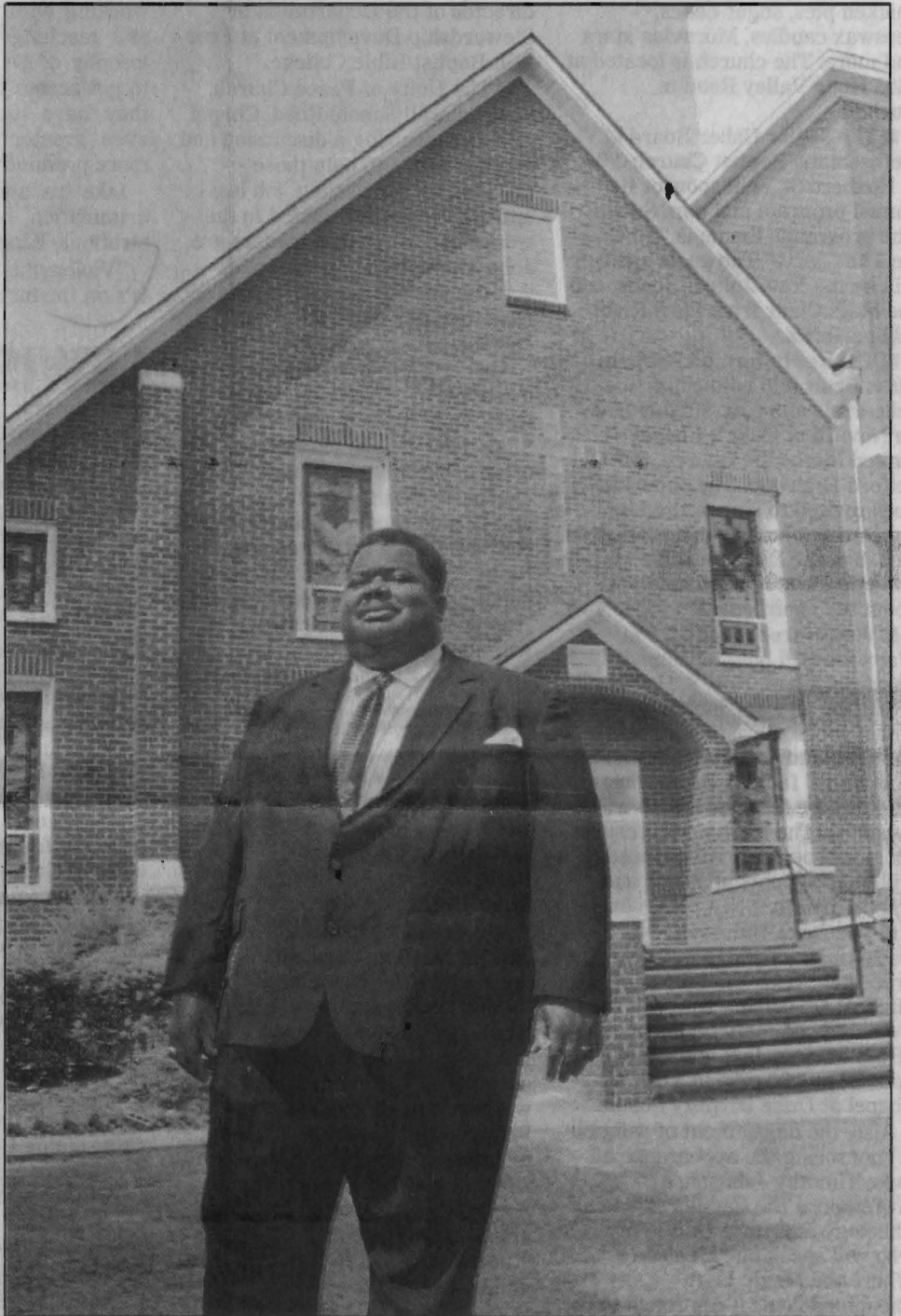
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King was 8 years old when his uncle was assassinated. He has few personal memories of his uncle. Most of what he knows was learned through his family and what he has read.

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Associated Press

PASTOR IN FAIRMONT: The Rev. Vernon Christopher King stands outside the First Baptist Church in Fairmont. King, the nephew of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., replaced the late Dr. Joy Johnston as pastor in June and is happy with the approval he has received from the congregation.

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KING

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TELEGRAM
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NOV 2 97

Minister follows steps of rights leaders

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AP photo

Rev. Vernon C. King stands outside his church

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