

# Louisiana Reach Haiti staff trapped in Port-au-Prince

March 19, 2024

CAP HAITIEN, Haiti (BP)—Louisiana Baptists and others urgently are praying for the safe return of two Louisiana Reach Haiti Children’s Village staff members trapped in Port-au-Prince, capital city of a country that has seen a rapid increase in gang activity.

Darrin Badon, president of Louisiana Reach Haiti, told the *Baptist Message* the staff members were visiting family members when the most recent explosion of violence occurred and have been trapped since.

Badon said the children and other staff at the Children’s Village are safe in Cap Haitien, a city 85 miles north of Port-au-Prince. However, he said, the airport in the city is closed, and they are starting to see shortages of food and goods that come from Port-au-Prince.

The ministry is a partnership between the Louisiana Baptist Convention, Haiti Baptist Convention, Louisiana Baptist churches and the Louisiana Baptist Children’s Home & Family Ministries.

“There are no flights or bus service, so the two staff members can’t get out of Port-au-Prince,” Badon said. “This is our biggest prayer request now. Pray for these two ladies to remain safe, for God to meet their physical needs and for God to find a way to get them back to Cap Haitien.”

According to the Associated Press, Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry announced March 12 he would resign once a transitional presidential council is created. Henry, who arrived in Puerto Rico a week ago, has been unable to enter Haiti because recent violence closed the country’s main international airports.

Gangs have burned police stations, attacked the country's main airport and raided two of the nation's largest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates.

Additionally, more than 15,000 Haitians are homeless after leaving neighborhoods raided by gangs.

## **What is Louisiana Reach Haiti?**

In 2015, a Louisiana Baptist team felt led to create a permanent presence in Haiti and partnered with Pastor Odvald Louis and his members at New Evangelical Baptist Church in Croix-Des-Bouquets. The Haitian congregation and Louisiana mission teams combined to complete a Children's Village in Croix-des-Bouquets. They also teamed up to dig a well and build a church building and school in neighboring Canaan.

However, the facilities in both cities were overtaken and vandalized by gangs in early 2022, Badon said.

Louisiana Reach Haiti then refocused its ministry on multiple fronts:

- In February 2022, escalating gang violence forced the Children's Village to relocate to the Florida House, a Florida Baptist Convention-owned home for missionaries in Port-au-Prince. The facility housed 21 children and six staff members. After more than a year at the Florida House the gangs started closing in on this area as well.
- Louisiana Reach Haiti leaders helped relocate Pastor Odvald Louis and his family from Haiti, which he fled after surviving an attempt on his life.
- Louisiana Reach Haiti began partnering with Connect International Church, a congregation in New Orleans. In April 2022, the church formed and hosted an international church—led by a Haitian

American graduate Pastor Dawest Louis of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary—that reaches out to Haitians and other nationalities.

- In July 2022 and 2023, Louisiana Reach Haiti partnered with Fellowship Church, Prairieville, and worked with this newly formed congregation to conduct Vacation Bible School for more than 30 children.

Badon said he is thankful for God’s hand over the children and staff throughout the many years of unrest in Haiti.

Children’s Village Director Antonio Auguste was kidnapped by gang members in Port-Au-Prince in March 2023 but was released three weeks later.

On July 1 last year, Badon flew into Cap Haitien, Haiti, and met with a small group of Haitians to prepare a new rental home for the children and staff. On July 4, Auguste, the staff and children loaded on a bus and traveled from Port-au-Prince to the new Children’s Village home near Cap Haitien, where they have remained.