

Gunmen kill deacon, kidnap his wife, at Haiti church

September 27, 2021

Armed gunmen attacked First Baptist Church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Sept. 26, killing a 60-year-old deacon and abducting his 59-year-old wife.

Deacon Sylner Lafaille was killed and his wife Marie Marthe Laurent Lafaille was kidnapped when gunmen stormed the church building, located a few kilometers from Haiti's National Palace.

‘Shameful, vile and unimaginable’

In a message to Everton Jackson, director of integral mission for the Baptist World Alliance, Pastor Josue Mathieu said his church had experienced “a shameful, vile and unimaginable event.”

Gunshots coming from the front gate of the church disrupted early morning worship services at First Baptist Church, he reported. Many worshippers began running or attempting to hide under pews, he continued. In the process, several sustained minor injuries.

While the most urgent matters are praying for the release of the kidnapped church member and making arrangements for her husband's funeral, members of the congregation also must deal with the trauma of the experience, Mathieu said.

“This unspeakable event comes at a time when we are trying to get our heads above water” after dealing with COVID-19 and civil unrest, he noted.

“It's like cold water poured into boiling water,” he continued. “The first Sunday in October is the general return to church activities, a period when

we receive dozens of newly baptized believers. We now find ourselves in front of the faithful traumatized by this dark event. The difficulties are enormous! There is a great need for psychological and post-traumatic treatment.”

Calls for prayer

Mathieu asked Christians to pray for “the liberation and deliverance of the country plagued by a security crisis driven by gangs.”

Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, likewise called for prayer soon after the attack on the Port-au-Prince church.

“Would you share and pray for this historic Baptist World Alliance church founded in 1835, for [Marie Lafaille’s] safe release, and for Haiti as they continue to respond to multiple challenges?” Brown [posted on Facebook](#).

The “multiple challenges” in Haiti include political upheaval, civil unrest and natural disasters, as well as persistent poverty. Haitian President Jovenel Moise was assassinated on July 7 in Port-au-Prince. An earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale hit southwest Haiti on Aug. 14. Two days later, Tropical Storm Grace drenched the region, causing flash floods.

The U.S. State Department in late August issued a [Level 4 travel advisory](#) for the nation, saying, “Do not travel to Haiti due to kidnapping, crime, civil unrest and COVID-19.”

‘Wanton and senseless’

Jackson, formerly regional secretary for Caribbean Baptists, urged citizens in Haiti not to lose hope.

“The invasion of the worship service, killing of a deacon and abduction of

his wife by armed bandits are testimony of the callous climate that has enveloped Haiti. Such a barbaric act is reflective of the 'spirit of the age' that glorifies rugged individualism at the expense of community spirit that engenders solidarity, neighbor love and a shared space of safety and security," Jackson said.

"At a time of global displacement and disorientation, it is regrettable that a nation state which had been the subject of colonial exploitation and is faced with political unrest, natural disasters and economic woes has had to deal with such high levels of wanton and senseless killings. In the midst of turmoil and confusion, I implore the Haitian people not to give up hope and the global community to demonstrate God's love and compassion in practical endeavors."

Ernie Rice, a Texas Baptist missionary to Haiti, currently is stateside while his wife Sharon recovers from shoulder surgery. In an email Sunday evening, Sept. 26, Rice wrote he was "just getting word" about the killing and kidnapping in Port-au-Prince.

"Kidnapping is almost a daily occurrence" in the capital city, he noted. "As the gangs get bolder it causes commercial activity and transportation to slow down, causing an imposed famine. This causes marginally moral people to turn to violence in desperation."

Rice, who serves now with the Universal City-based nonprofit organization Good for Haiti, began working in Haiti in 2011. Texas Baptist Men sent Rice to explore ways the missions organization could meet continuing needs after an earthquake.

For the past four years, Rice has served in Cap Destrée, Haiti, helping to provide the area with safe drinking water and working on multiple community development initiatives in partnership with a local church.

"So far, our small community far from Port(-au-Prince) is surviving," Rice

wrote, adding he plans to return to Haiti once his wife is recovered fully from her operation.

Editor's Note: This article, originally posted at noon on Monday, Sept. 27, was updated mid-afternoon on Tuesday, Sept. 28, after additional information became available.