

Haitian Baptists struggle to minister amid violence

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PORT AU PRINCE, Haiti (BP)—Pastor Samson Doreliens ministers in the midst of violence in Port Au Prince, the site of the July 27 kidnapping of an American nurse and her daughter who remain missing.

The 600 active congregants of the Evangelical Baptist Mission of South Haiti Church of Cote Plage are torn by the gang violence that has overtaken the city, Doreliens said.

“Some are drawn closer to God because they believe it is God only who can do something to take the pain away,” he said of the congregation. “Others are discouraged, questioning why God is letting all kinds of things happen to the country—violence, natural disasters.”

Distinction between urban and rural areas

Florida Baptist Haitian Fellowship President Jackson Voltaire helped organize the Baptist Missionary Confraternity of Haiti (Confraternité Missionnaire Baptiste d’Haiti), a convention of hundreds of churches spread across six regions there.

Those in the western region, including Port au Prince, worship under tremendous safety risks, he said, while those in rural communities can minister more freely.

“They hold worship services with a great deal of difficulty,” he said. “But thank God that’s happening mainly in the metropolitan areas where Port au

Prince is. In that region, the western region, we have hundreds of churches operating, but again ... with great difficulty.”

Attendance has dropped at the Evangelical Baptist Mission of South Haiti Church of Cote Plage, Doreliens said, where many members have lost their jobs or simply can't travel to work amid the violence. Sunday offerings are donated to the poor and widows.

Churches have reduced the frequency of worship services and Bible study and have cancelled evening events.

Haitians remain hopeful

Community outreach continues only with the risk of pastors being kidnapped or shot, Voltaire said, but many remain hopeful.

“Out of the many conversations I have with the pastors, and not only with the pastors, I would say the Haitian people in general, they are very hopeful. And if you consider it, the country cannot go any lower than the way it is now,” he said.

In addition to such highly publicized kidnappings as that of El Roi Haiti ministry nurse Alix Dorsainvil and her daughter, numerous kidnappings occur daily in the capital city, Voltaire said. Gangs who control the city typically kidnap residents for ransom while pressuring families to remain silent.

Dorsainvil, a nurse who relocated from New Hampshire to work for the ministry whose director is her husband, is being held under a \$1 million ransom, area residents told the Associated Press.

El Roi Haiti continues to pray for Dorsainvil's release as the U.S. State Departments and others actively seek her freedom.

“Many tears have been shed this week, but we, together with our team, are working and praying continuously to bring them home safely, and we continue to hold onto hope,” the ministry blogged Aug. 3.

“We are so thankful for the very knowledgeable and experienced professionals God has brought together to complete the task of securing their freedom.”

Call for patience

While Haiti remains under a “do not travel advisory” from the U.S. State Department, Voltaire said many pastors look forward to the day when Southern Baptists can return to Haiti.

“There’s hope because God is in Haiti as well. And I am sure that there are things that the Haitian people themselves need to do,” Voltaire said, referencing 2 Chronicles 7:14.

He encouraged Southern Baptists to be patient and be prepared to return to Haiti when violence subsides.

“As far as the CMBH, as far as the Florida Haitian Baptist Fellowship, we are organizing ourselves in a way that whenever God allows the missions to resume, when the greater Southern Baptist family is ready to come to Haiti, they will come to a much better, more productive environment where we can do ministry and really impact that side of the island for the Lord.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: The Associated Press reported Aug. 9 that an aid organization in Haiti announced American nurse Alix Dorsainvil and her daughter were freed nearly two weeks after they were kidnapped.