

Church agency: Captive missionaries in Haiti made daring escape

by [Peter Smith](#) in the [January 12, 2022](#) issue



Unidentified people board a vehicle departing for the airport from the Christian Aid Ministries headquarters in Titanyen, Haiti, on December 16. (AP Photo/Odelyn Joseph)

Captive missionaries in Haiti found freedom in December by making a daring overnight escape, eluding their kidnappers and walking for miles over difficult, moonlit terrain with an infant and other children in tow, according to the agency they work for, officials said on December 20.

The group of 12 navigated by stars to reach safety after a two-month kidnapping ordeal, officials with the Christian Aid Ministries, the Ohio-based agency that the captive missionaries work for, said at a press conference.

A total of 17 people from the missionary group—12 adults and five minors—were abducted on October 16, shortly after visiting an orphanage in Ganthier. The group included 16 Americans and one Canadian.

Their captors from the 400 Mawozo gang initially demanded millions of dollars in ransom. Five other captives had earlier reached freedom. It is still unclear if any ransom was paid.

CAM general director David Troyer did say supporters of CAM raised funds for possible use for a ransom, but he refused to say whether one was paid for any of the releases.

The 12 who fled in December carried the infant and three-year-old, wrapping the baby to protect her from the briars and brambles, said CAM spokesman Weston Showalter.

“After a number of hours of walking, day began to dawn, and they eventually found someone who helped to make a phone call for help,” he said. “They were finally free.”

The 12 were flown to Florida on a US Coast Guard flight. They later reunited with the five hostages who were released earlier.

At the press conference, CAM displayed photos showing the freed hostages being reunited, along with a video of the group singing a song that had inspired them during their captivity.

They were not physically harmed by the kidnappers, Showalter said. He said the main physical challenges included the heat, mosquitoes, and contaminated water for bathing, which caused some of them to develop sores. Sometimes the young children got sick.

However, he said everyone appears to have emerged from captivity in good health.

The adults received small food portions, although the captors provided plenty of food suitable for the small children, he said.

The hostages gathered multiple times during the day for prayer and religious devotions, Showalter said, adding that when they were in separate rooms, they sometimes sang loud enough for each other to hear.

They also sought to encourage other hostages who were being held for ransom in separate kidnappings, Showalter said.

Over time, the hostages agreed to try to escape, and they chose the night of December 15.

“When they sensed the timing was right, they found a way to open the door that was closed and blocked, filed silently to the path they had chosen to follow, and quickly left the place they were held, despite the fact that numerous guards were close by,” Showalter said.

Based in Berlin, Ohio, CAM is supported and staffed by conservative Anabaptists. — Associated Press