

The Virgin Islands Consortium

73-Year-Old Carjacking Victim Remains Unconscious, Airlifted to Miami Hospital; Church Members Hold Evangelistic Outreach At Grove Place Park Where Incident Occurred

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Ernice Gilbert **August 24, 2015**



ST. CROIX – A group of about 60 faithful parishioners gathered Sunday afternoon under a large almond tree at a Grove Place park to sing, pray and share a message of mercy and forgiveness to neighborhood residents. The location of the gathering is believed to be where, just a week before, a beloved church member was viciously attacked and left for dead during a carjacking.

Members of Calvary Baptist church, under the leadership of pastor Anthony Benjamin, could be seen joyously singing hymns, such as “My Savior Lives” and “He’ll Do It Again” at the David E. Hamilton Jackson park during a two-hour gathering from 4 to 6 p.m. Given the upbeat mood of the assembly, it was hard to tell that only days before, on Monday, August 17, church elder Augustus Bannis, 73, had been beaten unconscious while gathering almonds at the park after 11 a.m. that day.

In a short sermon based on the Old Testament text Isaiah 55, Pastor Benjamin passionately laid out the Bible’s case for God extending mercy toward anyone who would receive it. However, he made no mention of the near-fatal attack of his parishioner six



Augustus Bannis, 73, with his wife.

“If you come as you are, He will receive you,” Pastor Benjamin shared over the loud speaker, adding, “Although you come as you are, He will never leave you as you are. I can forgive your transgressions, but only God can pardon your sin.”

When asked about his decision to not address the carjacking incident, Pastor Benjamin said it had to do with his desire to demonstrate God’s love to the community.

“We want folks to know that regardless of what they might have done God still loves them as they are,” he began. “God’s mercy is extended to them as they are in their respective conditions.”

Pastor Benjamin continued, “The other reason is, we didn’t want to agitate anyone or announce we’re here because of this incident that occurred so as to somehow excite some people in a bad way. I also did not want them to feel outside of the scope of God’s love and God’s mercy because of what they might have done. I wanted them to know they’re still within the parameters that God can reach them and God loves them just as they are regardless of what they might have done.”

Pastor Benjamin told The Consortium that Bannis remains unconscious with severe head and facial injuries. He was airlifted to the Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami on Saturday night to receive additional care.

“His condition has not changed. He still isn’t responding. He still isn’t speaking and hasn’t opened his eyes as of Saturday night when he left to go to Jackson Memorial in Miami,” the pastor said.

Yet, Pastor Benjamin pointed out that his faith gives him the assurance that Bannis will make a full recovery.

“I firmly believe that God certainly is in this equation with Brother Bannis. He’s been one of God’s choicest servants, in my opinion. He served God faithfully for many, many years. I also believe these are opportunities where God shows himself in a kind of way that perhaps he would not have shown himself. I believe that God is going to perform a great miracle through this.”

The spiritual leader added, “All of the expert opinion we’ve gotten up until this point has indicated that this is outside of the scope of medicine. This is something that if it’s going to be done only God can do it.”

News of the violent attack set off a firestorm among St. Croix residents and throughout the territory. Pastor Benjamin said many churches and individuals on island, as well as throughout the Caribbean and the United States have been praying for Bannis’ recovery. They pray for themselves in.



Praise team of the Calvary Baptist

Church and congregants sing inspirational songs in the area believed to be location where Augustus Bannis was assaulted.

“We would really love for those persons who perpetrated this act to know God is merciful and that God is just. And that we, as children of God, are merciful and just. We are not looking for vengeance in this situation. We are not looking for the worst for anyone out of this situation. We are looking for the very best in the midst of this situation.

“We would like them to acknowledge that they did something wrong and they should throw themselves at the mercy of the law. I would encourage them to give up themselves and if they are afraid to do that, come see me. Come see the pastor. Come sit down and talk with me. Again, we’re not looking for vengeance, we’re looking for justice.”

Bannis’ car has not been recovered. Detectives continue to investigate the case.

Timeline of Events

At 11 a.m. Monday, August 17 Bannis had taken the short five-minute drive from his Estate Upper Love home to the David Hamilton Jackson park in Grove Place to gather almonds, a favorite pastime of his. He left his cellphone and wallet at home.

Around 2 p.m. when Bannis had not returned home, his wife alerted relatives. At round 4 p.m., she informed the church secretary that her husband had not returned from Grove Place earlier in the day. Church members called the hospital to inquire if Bannis had been admitted. Hospital personnel did not release any information to the family and instructed them to call 911. Church members also searched the Grove Place neighborhood where Bannis had gone, but did not find any signs of the man or his car.

After Bannis' family members filed a police report late Monday night, police put out an all-points bulletin (APB) for the victim at around 9:30 p.m. Within minutes of the APB being issued, Pastor Benjamin received a call on his cellphone that Bannis had been carjacked and brought badly beaten to the Juan Luis Hospital earlier that day.

At the hospital on Monday night, family members were notified that Bannis was found at the park at around 12 p.m. severely beaten and was transported to the hospital by ambulance.

Sources close to the victim's family say Bannis remains unconscious with severe head and face injuries. His turquoise older model Chevy Cavalier has not been recovered.

Anyone with information regarding this incident should call 911.

Feature Image: Calvary Baptist Pastor Anthony Benjamin ministering the Gospel in area believed to be location where Bannis was assaulted.

[Watch the original video](#)