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Nelson Mandela Bridge in Johannesburg, South Africa (Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons Attribution 2.0)

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A pastor was abducted by armed and masked men as he was preaching a sermon before a congregation in South Africa's Eastern Cape province, police said April 11.

Four men broke into the Fellowship Baptist church in Motherwell Township on April 10, stole two cellphones from members of the congregation and took away the pastor in his own truck, said police, who have initiated an investigation into abduction and armed robbery.

Local media named the victim as Josh Sullivan, 45, from the U.S. state of Tennessee, but police would not confirm the identification.

According to the Fellowship Baptist church blog, Sullivan, who described himself as a "church-planting missionary," his wife Meagan and two children arrived in South Africa in November 2018 to run the Motherwell branch.

An image showing Sullivan preaching behind a pulpit was uploaded on X by a user going by the name of Tom Hatley. Sullivan identifies a man with the same name as his childhood and training pastor on his own blog. Hatley claimed that he was posting on Sullivan's wife's behalf and prayed for a safe return.

A Maryville, Tennessee, woman by the name Tonya Rinker, who lists Sullivan as her son in her profile, expressed heartbreak on Facebook and asked for prayers for her son, daughter-in-law and grandkids, adding that the American embassy in South Africa was working on finding him.

Police spokesperson Captain Andre Beetge confirmed in a statement that the stolen truck, a silver Toyota Fortuner, was found abandoned in Motherwell a short while after the incident.

Additionally, the police Anti-Gang Unit has now taken over the investigation that was opened by the South African Police Service in Motherwell.

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Beetge would not provide details about the victim but said that if a ransom was demanded, the case would be handed over to the Hawks — a specialized police unit that investigates organized crime, economic crime, corruption and other serious crimes.

"As I understand, there has been no ransom raised," said Beetge, urging anyone with information to come forward.

As they await Sullivan's safe return, supporters flocked to the pastor's personal blog site and other social media platforms to offer their well-wishes.

"We are now praying that you delivered from these evil men," a poster named Richard Stockton said on the church website. "Praying the Holy Spirit well work on their hearts and be saved. And release you!!!"

Another supporter called Kody Moore said Josh was a "faithful brother doing much to make Christ known in Africa."

"Please pray for Josh to be brought home safely and especially his family during this absolutely terrible time. May Christ be magnified," he tweeted on X.