

Devastating Blaze: Father, Daughter Lost In Act of Love



By **Abu Nmodu** 2 Days Ago in Feature



Mr. Ikechukwu Michael Njoku, who lost his life while trying to rescue his six-year-old daughter from the fire



The six-year-old Esther Michael Ikechukwu, who tragically lost her life in the 3 a.m. fire.

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Every parent's prayer is to protect their children, to keep them safe from harm, and to see them grow into tomorrow. For Mr. Ikechukwu Michael Njoku, a devoted father and senior servant at St. Andrew's Anglican Church, and his daughter Esther Michael, that prayer ended in unimaginable tragedy. On March 2nd, a fire tore through their home in Sabon Gari, Minna, and both father and daughter lost their lives, leaving a family and community reeling from the heartbreak. ABU NMODU writes in this report.

Every parent dreams of keeping their children safe, of shielding them from the dangers of the world. But sometimes, fate arrives too suddenly, and in a single moment, life changes forever.

Mr. Ikechukwu Michael Njoku, a senior servant at St. Andrew's Anglican Church in Minna, lived with his family in a building that also served as a residence for other church workers and corp members. On March 2nd, that home became the scene of a tragic fire that claimed his life and that of his young daughter, Esther Michael

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The Njoku family's home, nestled beside St. Andrew's Anglican Church, in Sabon Gari, Minna, became the scene of a terrifying blaze. Flames spread with alarming speed, devouring the house and leaving neighbours in shock. What had been a place of warmth and laughter was suddenly consumed by fire.

In a heroic act of love, and a desperate attempt to save his daughter, Mr. Ikechukwu Michael Njoku ran into the flames to save his child Esther Michael. Tragically, both lost their lives in the inferno. Their deaths have left Mrs. Victoria Njoku, their surviving children, and the entire church community in profound grief, mourning a father and daughter whose lives ended in courage and devotion.

Mr. Ikechukwu Michael Njoku, a senior servant at St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Minna, lived with his family in a building that also housed other church workers and corp members. In a heartbreaking turn, a fire engulfed the residence, tragically claiming his life and that of his daughter, leaving a family and community shattered.

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LEADERSHIP Weekend findings revealed that the late Ikechukwu Michael Njoku held multiple roles within St. Andrew's Anglican Church. According to church members, in addition to working in the Anglican Children's Ministry (ACM), he also served faithfully as the church sexton.

Eyewitnesses to the fire revealed that Mr. Ikechukwu Njoku died while trying to save his daughter, Esther, who was trapped in the blaze. Tragically, Esther did not survive, and Mr. Ikechukwu succumbed to severe burns a few days later.

What made the tragedy even more heartbreaking was that Esther had just celebrated her sixth birthday only hours before the fire. She had been full of life and laughter, and no one could have imagined that she would be gone so suddenly.

LEADERSHIP Weekend findings further revealed that the fire on that fateful day was triggered by the explosion of a gas cylinder, which ignited after a mosquito coil started a small blaze.

The building that was destroyed stood very close to temporary structures along the church fence. These makeshift structures housed scrap scavengers' shops, storing various items, which may have contributed to the rapid spread of the fire.

The fire reportedly started from the temporary structures near the church fence and gradually spread to the building where Mr. Ikechukwu Njoku and his family lived, eventually causing the gas cylinder on the premises to explode.

The horror of the scene was etched in the memories of neighbours. A corp member living in the same compound, Mary, recalled the harrowing moment; "When the fire started, we heard the cries of Mr. Ikechukwu's daughter calling for help. In the chaos, the parents in the other room woke up, and the father realised his daughter was trapped in the flames. He rushed into the fire in a desperate attempt to save her."

Another resident, Umaru Danlami, corroborated the account, saying, "Mr. Ikechukwu was brave; he did not think about himself. He rushed into the fire to save his daughter."

He added that everyone in the vicinity tried their best to rescue the victims, but their efforts were not enough. The fire broke out around 3 a.m., a time when immediate help was scarce, and reaching the fire service was difficult. Even when the fire service arrived, the blaze had already caused severe damage, moving so quickly that rescuing the father and daughter became nearly impossible. The sheer speed and intensity of the fire left everyone in shock and confusion.

Asked whether the fire originated from their shops before spreading to the church, Danladi Umaru, the owner of the scrap shop and a neighbour to the late Mr. Ikechukwu, said, "We saw the fire in their building first; there was no trace of fire from our side. It was the fire from that building that extended to the other shops."

He added, "We saw the gas cylinder that exploded. We are certain something sparked it. It was definitely not an electrical fault. The cylinder's flame from the

mosquito coil alone could not have caused the explosion.”

Attempts by LEADERSHIP Weekend to get Venerable Kingsley to comment on the cause of the fire proved unsuccessful. The cleric said that social media coverage had already caused enough damage.

Efforts to also reach the Controller of the Niger State Fire Service, Usman F. Usman, were also unsuccessful, leaving questions about the extent of the agency's investigation and the steps taken to control the blaze.

The public relations officer of the Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA), Ibrahim Hussain, confirmed reports of fire incidents from the Sabongari area of Minna. He noted that the agency would review the full report to determine possible assistance for the victims and strategies to prevent future occurrences. “Fire is a devastating disaster and we must not only show empathy and sympathy but provide assistance whenever possible, based on the official report.”

Neighbours recounted that Esther died instantly in the blaze, while Mr. Ikechukwu was pulled out with severe burns. He initially received treatment at IBB Specialist Hospital, Minna, before being referred to the Teaching Hospital in Gwagwalada, where he tragically passed away about a week later.

His wife, Mrs. Victoria Njoku, and their remaining three children were left not only to grieve the loss of their loved ones but also to cope with injuries they sustained while trying to save them.

Mr. John Chukwu, the late Njoku's brother, described the pain as overwhelming, saying that the entire family, including his wife struggled to come to terms with his passing.

He recalled that his brother was humble, deeply loving, and devoted to everyone around him. A passionate lover of God, he was a dedicated member of St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Minna, whose life reflected faith, service, and compassion.

He was humble to a fault, loved his family even to death, and was our mother's favourite, born after 15 years of childlessness,” Mr. John Chukwu said.

He added, “Our mother would literally sacrifice everything to give him gifts. She fondly called him ‘IK.’”

According to him, “The family depended on him so much. He was deeply prayerful, and on the very Monday he died, he led the morning devotion, with no inkling that it would be his last day.”

He added, “I fought a good fight to save his children. He died a legend, living a meaningful life, not a wasted one. We are grateful to the church for standing by the family throughout this tragic ordeal.”

Last Tuesday, a service of song was held at St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Minna, in honour of the deceased. The grief was so overwhelming that neither the wife nor the young children could utter a word, the trauma clearly taking its toll.

In his sermon, Venerable Kingsley Obi read from various portions of the Bible to console the family, reminding them that death is an inevitable part of human life. He acknowledged that the loss of Mr. Michael Njoku and his daughter was deeply painful but assured the mourners that God knows what is best.

He said, “Their deaths should remind us of the fragility of life and the urgency to show love to one another while we are alive. Strive to live in peace with one another. Trials will come, but what we leave behind matters, what will people say about you?”

Speaking of Michael Ikechukwu Njoku, he added that the late father had left behind a good name and described him as “a hero in God’s vineyard.” He reassured the mourners that, though the fire has taken them from this earth, they are now in safe hands and will rise, clothed in glory, on the last day.

According to Venerable Kingsley Obi, “Death is not the end for those in Christ, but a doorway to eternal life. In Christ, death is defeated. Heaven is real, hell is real, repent, for we do not know when our hour will come.”

One of Mr. Njoku’s close allies, who gave his name as Okey, said, “Michael Ikechukwu spent 35 years in the children’s ministry. He was humble, respectful, and made countless sacrifices, often attending to duties he was not required to do.”

Also speaking on behalf of the church, Mrs. Uche said, “I knew late Ikechukwu Michael as a man with uncommon zeal and dedication to serve. As a sexton, he would tidy even the places that had been abandoned for years, and he did his work diligently and without complaint.”

“He was always cheerful, so much that you would hardly know he was facing difficulties. Despite everything, he never missed church programmes and always held hope for things he had not yet seen,” she added.

As the church community continues to reel from the loss, mourning both Mr. Ikechukwu and his daughter, questions remain about the measures in place to ensure the safety of staff and residents, and about holding accountable those responsible for the fire. For now, Mrs. Victoria Njoku and her three children need support more than ever to cope with the unimaginable loss.