

# Pastor to die by hanging for killing A'Ibom landlord

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The Resident Pastor of Living Faith Church Chapel, Ifa Ikot Ubo–Ifa Ikot Okpon Branch, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Emmanuel Umoh, has been sentenced to death by hanging.

Umoh was sentenced by Justice Gabriel Ette of the state High Court for killing a 500-level Civil Engineering student of the University of Uyo, Gabriel Bassey, who was also his landlord.

The pastor was convicted for stabbing Edward to death on December 21, 2020, at Ifa Ikot Ubo in the Uyo Local Government Area of the state.

The court was informed that the deceased relocated to his late mother's property at Ifa Ikot Ubo to secure the estate and also live closer to school.

His mother, before her death in December 2019, had established a nursery school on the property.

Evidence before the court indicated that the late landlord lived in a two-bedroom flat attached to a long hall within the compound alongside his younger brother, Emmanuel Bassey.

The hall, originally constructed for school purposes, was later rented to Living Faith Church at an annual rent of N150,000, with the consent of his father, Emana Bassey, a retired school principal.

The church was allowed to commence use of the hall, even before full payment of rent, it was gathered.

The convict was subsequently posted to the branch as its pioneer resident pastor.

Evidence presented before the court revealed further that on December 21, 2020, the defendant was seen entering the deceased's compound, after which the neighbours began to hear screams of "Jesus" from inside the premises.

Shortly afterwards, the defendant emerged wearing a white garment stained with blood, claiming he fell off while attempting to hang a banner.

The deceased was never seen alive again.

On December 26, 2020, a day after Christmas, Edward's decomposing body was discovered in his room, wrapped in a mat with multiple lacerations and a butcher's knife found beside him.

The defendant, being the last person seen with Edward and possessing unexplained bloodstains, was promptly arrested and charged with murder.

The defendant, who was arraigned on December 6, 2021, on one-count charge of murder, pleaded not guilty.

To establish its case, the prosecution called six witnesses, including the deceased's father, Emanu Bassey, who testified as the first prosecution witness.

He told the court that shortly after the church began operations, the defendant requested permission to store church chairs and other items inside the deceased's flat for security reasons, as the hall lacked doors and windows.

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The father said the request was granted.

However, the arrangement soon became problematic.

Whenever the defendant needed access to church property kept in the flat, the deceased, often away, had to return home to grant access, incurring transport expenses that were not refunded.

Following complaints, the father directed his son to give the defendant a spare key to ease access.

The prosecution led evidence that after the key was handed over, items belonging to the deceased's late mother, including clothes, plates and other valuables, began to get missing.

The defendant, being in possession of the spare key, became a suspect.

When confronted, the defendant claimed he had lost the key.

The matter was reported to the church's senior pastor, Owoidoho Akpan, who testified as a defence witness who provided N5,000 to enable the deceased change the locks.

According to evidence before the court, no further items went missing after the locks were changed.

Tensions later arose between the deceased and the defendant over the handling of rent money reportedly paid for the use of the hall and intended for repairs.

Delivering judgment which lasted for over two hours, Justice Gabriel Ette described the case as "very sympathetic," recounting the efforts of the deceased's late mother to build and develop the property for educational purposes before her death.

The court held that the prosecution proved its case beyond reasonable doubt.

Justice Ette condemned the act, noting the irony of a religious leader taking a life within church premises.

"Life is sacred and those who represent God on earth should teach that. It is an irony and quite appalling when a man who claims to be the representative of the divine on earth stoops so low as to denigrate the very essence of his calling and take someone's life on the premises of the church," Justice Ette held.

He further stated that individuals, who betray public trust in such a manner, pose a danger to society and must face the full weight of the law.

"Having found you guilty as charged, I hereby sentence you to death by hanging," the court declared.