

Metro

Gunmen invade Imo church, kill pastor's aide, rob congregation

By **Collins Osuji, Owerri**

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*Victim*

Pandemonium broke out in Orodo community, Mbaitoli Local Council, Imo State, as gunmen invaded a local church, God's Doing and Deliverance Ministry, killing one of the church elders, Mr Samuel Ogbonna.

The victim, owner of a popular restaurant and bar called Feel at Home, was a youth leader in the community and a close associate of the church's General

Overseer, Evangelist Maduabuchi Ernest, popularly known as “Dibia Ekpere” or “Father MEMC”.

An eyewitness in Owerri yesterday said that around 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, eight gunmen arrived at the premises in a red Highlander and a black Lexus saloon car and attacked during an ongoing service.

He disclosed that upon seeing the gunmen, the victim fled but was shot several times in the back after his assailants chased him into a nearby bush.

According to the eyewitness, the attackers ordered the congregation to lie down and took their mobile phones, bags, and cash.

The attackers also abducted two church members, a man and a nursing mother, but later released them along Owerri-Orlu road. They also made off with the church owner’s car.

The eyewitness said: “We were in the middle of our church prayer session when some armed men rushed in and ordered everyone to lie down while pointing their guns at us.

“Then they started asking for Father MEMC. We told them he wasn’t around, but they insisted he was. They searched everywhere for him but couldn’t find him. I guess they were angry that Father MEMC wasn’t there. They took two of our members and forced them into one of the cars parked within the church premises, which belongs to Father MEMC.

“While driving out of the church compound, we heard several gunshots followed by a loud shout, which we later learned was the attack on Elder Ogbonna. The Elder was coming back to church to rejoin the service after running an errand, but on seeing the gunmen, he fled into a nearby bush. They chased him and shot him several times.

“After driving a few kilometres, they released the two members they kidnapped earlier. We are all living in fear. Many of us, including Orodo natives, have left the church and the community. Even those who came with their sick relatives for prayers at the church have also taken them home.

“In fact, the church has been closed, and the whereabouts of some of us are still unknown because many ran into the bush. This is really unfortunate.”

Efforts to get a reaction from the General Overseer regarding the incident were unsuccessful, as several calls to his telephone line went unanswered up until press time.

When contacted, the spokesperson for the Imo State Police Command, ASP Henry Okoye, confirmed the incident and said that operatives have launched a manhunt for the perpetrators of the attack.

Okoye assured the public that the command would leave no stone unturned in its efforts to ensure that those behind the attack and other senseless killings are arrested and brought to justice.

He also urged residents of the state to provide the command with any actionable intelligence that would help rid the state of criminal elements.

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