

'Baptism' gone awry



The jubilation that trailed the final examination of graduating students of the Imo State University (IMSU) has ended in sorrow, with the death of a 200-Level student, Chisom Chukwudiebube Valentine. Chisom fell into a sewage and died when he tried to 'baptise' his graduating colleague at their off-campus residence, Blackberry Hostel. EKENE AHANEKU (300-Level Medicine and Surgery) reports.

It all started as a celebration, but it ended in tragedy at an off-campus students' hostel in the Imo State University (IMSU). Last Friday, a student died after slipping into a sewage during the baptism of a graduating student at Blackberry Hotel. The late Chisom Chukwudiebube Valentine was a 200-Level Government Education student.

Baptism, in many higher institutions, is a celebration to either welcome freshers or send off graduating students. During baptism, students are splashed with water or sticky liquids by their colleagues.

Worried by the effect of the practice, some higher institutions tried to stop it, but students took it off-campus.

At IMSU, the management, it was learnt, banned students from engaging in baptism. But the students moved it off-campus.

The late Chisom, it was gathered, was in his room when a final year student of Nutrition and Dietetics, Ugochukwu Okorie, returned to the hostel at 2pm, celebrating his graduation. He called other occupants, who had been waiting to hold the ritual. CAMPUSLIFE gathered that the residents, including the late Chisom, came out to 'baptise' Ugochukwu.

Chisom carried Ugochukwu and took him to a pit in which sewage from the bathroom is collected.

It was gathered that Ugochukwu complained of weakness and pleaded for rest. But, Chisom would not oblige him. As the surface of the pit was slippery, both of them slipped into it. There was commotion as the students ran around to rescue them. They were joined by the property caretaker. Ugochukwu waved for help. He was lucky as he was evacuated.

But, Chisom was not so lucky. Efforts by rescuers to locate him in the messy water failed. When he was evacuated, dirty water flowed out of his mouth and nostrils.

After performing first aid on the victims, they were rushed to the Holy Family Hospital in Ikenegbu, where a doctor confirmed Chisom dead. Ugochukwu, who had stabilised, had bruises on his body.

Immediately, rescuers contacted the victims' parents. Soon, the late Chisom's uncle arrived at the hospital, fighting back tears. He called family members to inform them of the tragedy.

He advised the students to desist from the celebration.

The late Chisom's parents later arrived at the hospital and took his body to their Ihiala home town in Anambra State.

The following day, the hostel President, Ifeanyi Udumaga, notified the institution's Chief Security Officer (CSO), who reportedly informed policemen at the Orji Police Station to wade into the matter, since the incident occurred off-campus.

But, when Ugochukwu and some students went to the police station to make a statement, he was held.

He was released on bail two days after to enable him complete his treatment.

Ifeanyi told *CAMPUSLIFE*: "It is a sad moment for us in Blackberry Hostel because of Chisom's death. We did not expect that a mere celebration could lead to a tragedy. But, the police want to compound the whole thing because they were not there when the incident happened. Why should anyone think Chisom was deliberately killed?"

A resident of the hostel, who did not give his name, said: "We thank God that the second victim did not die. If Ugochukwu had died in the pit, it would have been a bigger problem for all of us in the hostel. People would have said the incident was planned to kill the two students. But, we have learnt our lesson in a hard way."

Reliving his experience in the pit to *CAMPUSLIFE*, Ugochukwu said he felt a shock in the pit. "My survival is by God's grace, because it was really a terrible incident," he said.