

# Celestial church members mob PUNCHman, police probe attack

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By Dayo Oyewo

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A security guard, identified simply as Rotimi, alongside worshippers of the Celestial Church of Christ, Sharon Parish, have brutalised a PUNCHman, Deji Lambo, on the church premises on Mobolaji Benson Street, Lowa, Igbooluwo, in the Ikorodu area of Lagos State.

Deji had visited the church to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the death of an electrician, Taiwo Akinlotan, who got electrocuted while fixing some electrical appliances in the church on Friday, November 5, 2022.

Upon getting to the front gate of the church, the reporter approached a young lady, asked for the head of the church, and was directed to a church member, one Mr Lambo, who after hearing the reason for our correspondent's visit, took him into the church's premises and introduced him to some colleagues.

A senior member of the church, who was among the colleagues, while attending to our correspondent, called the Chairman of the church, Adeleke Oduwole, and handed his phone to our correspondent to explain the reason for the visit.

During the deliberation, the reporter told Oduwole that he wanted to speak with a church spokesman on the events that led to Akinlotan's death.

Oduwole, thereafter, said he and some church members were with the deceased's family members at the Ikorodu General Hospital to retrieve his corpse for burial.

Upon hearing this, Deji asked to speak to the victim's family members in a bid to reflect their views in the report.

He told Oduwole that he would hang up the call so he could use his personal number to call the cleric back.

Shortly after hanging up, the spokesperson for the church, Akin Adesanya, called and while speaking with Deji, said he was informed that the reporter said the family petitioned PUNCH on the tragedy.

He, however, noted that the deceased's family refuted the claim, adding that policemen were on their way to the church to arrest our correspondent.

Afterwards, some church members, numbering about 30, descended on the reporter, pinned him down, seized his phones and demanded his means of identification.

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Deji brought out his ID card but the church members seized it, pounced on him, as the security guard slapped him and labelled him a thief.

The church members, led by a woman identified simply as Iya Ibeji, also used their mobile phones to film our correspondent during the assault.

The church members circled our reporter and interrogated him on his mission in the church as they alleged that he planned to destroy the church's image.

Adesanya, who had yet to get to the church, later called another PUNCHman, Johnny Edwards, who confirmed his identity.

The spokesman thereafter drove to the church and rescued the reporter while being mobbed by the worshippers.

He subsequently drove our correspondent out of the premises to his office, where he apologised for the assault.

However, the matter was reported at the Owutu Police Station.

Reacting to the development, Adesanya said the attack was caused by a gap in communication.

He said, "It is never in our character to take laws into our hands. The unfortunate incident negates everything we preach. The security officer in question has been relieved of his role immediately and handed over to the police for further questioning.

"The two parishioners that took out their mobile phones to record the incident have also been reprimanded. Upon going through their phones, we are happy to inform you that there was no recording of any sort found in them; one took pictures and the pictures were immediately deleted."

The state Police Public Relations Officer, SP Benjamin Hundeyin, said investigations were ongoing into the matter.