

The Lifeline

How deacon kidnapped, killed church member's daughter, 2 others

• Confesses being in and out of prison over another murder case

From **Okey Sampson**, Umuahia

IN the morning of September 21, 2021, when Mr. Christian Ndife, 60, from Awkuzu in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State, resident in Umuahia, the Abia State capital, left home after discussing some business strategy for the day with his wife, Virginia, little did he know that would be their last discussion on earth as husband and wife.

The Ndifes had converted part of their apartment on 67, Agulu Street, Umuahia, to a sachet (pure) water factory and Virginia was in charge.

When Mr. Ndife left for town that faithful day for other business concerns, a man whose name was given as Salem Chukwunyere came calling. The visitor was said to be a plumber who maintained the water pipes of the Ndifes when they were not functioning well. Therefore, he knew the apartment well.

But Chukwunyere's visit on September 21 was laced with suspicion. Ndife said he was told the plumber came into their apartment through the kitchen entrance.

Ndife stated that he was at their family house in the town when his daughter, who had earlier in the day gone to school, called on her return from school to inform him that his wife had been killed. Perplexed, he rushed to the house, only to see the lifeless body of his wife: "I noticed that my wife was strangled with a blue bathing sponge; the entire room was scattered."

Ndife said, in an attempt to confuse matters after killing his wife, the assailant wrote something on a sheet of paper and placed on the ground that he was looking for some documents and when he called the deceased, she told him to do his worst.

"He said he had done some plumbing services for my wife and also sent same message to

my brother-in-law, Anthony Okeke, that he was looking for his keke (tricycle) documents."

But the truth of the matter, Ndife said, was that the man demanded a certain amount of money from his wife, who told him what she could afford was N100,000 and when the man wanted to be violent, his victim threatened to inform her family members and he decided to take her life, perhaps thinking that would save the day for him.

After the incident, Ndife reported the matter to the police and Department of State Security (DSS), and, after two weeks, the DSS arrested the suspect on his way to church.

According to security reports, Chukwunyere, during interrogation, did not only confess to have killed Virginia but also admitted to have murdered one Chioma Nwoke in Owerri, in August 2021.

The irony of the incident was that the sus-



•Virginia

pect and Chioma's mother, Clementina, attend the same church and were ordained deacon and deaconess of the church the same day!

"Murder is an inherently evil act, no matter what the circumstances, no matter how convincing the rationalizations." -Bentley Little

Giving an account of what happened to her daughter, Miss Nwoke, in the hands of her church member, Mrs. Clementina Nwoke, from Avutu Obowo, Imo State, resident in the German Floor area of Umuahia, Abia State, said her 32-year-old daughter was kidnapped and murdered by a member of their church, Salem Chukwunyerere.

According to her, Chioma, who dealt in women clothings and resided in Mgbirichi, Imo State, was kidnapped in August 2021 by the said Chukwunyerere, a member of The Apostolic Church, in Umuahia.

Mrs. Nwoke, who could not hold back tears while narrating her daughter's ordeal to this reporter, said, in August last year, when she could not contact her daughter on phone as she used to, she reached out to Chioma's neighbours at Mgbirichi. They informed her that her daughter moved out of her residence on a certain day with a Bible, strolling out with a young man who paid her a visit and was yet to return to her house.

Mrs. Nwoke moved fast: "I reported the case of my missing daughter to the DSS in Abia State and they told me to report to the Imo State office of DSS, since the incident took place in Imo State," she explained.

She did as directed, but a different twist crept in. The distraught woman said: "I reported the matter to DSS office in Owerri. Some days after, someone called me on phone using Chioma's number, telling me to bring N15 million, if I want to see my daughter again."

Disturbed by the development, Mrs. Nwoke went back to the DSS to inform them about the call and the secret service concluded it could be a case of kidnapping and spread their dragnet in that direction.

"They advised me not to rush in offering the abductors ransom. The person kept calling me and sending several text messages telling me to bring money. I offered them N50,000 and he told me I was not serious. He kept sending me different text messages."

Mrs. Nwoke said she later managed to raise N100,000 and when the man called again, he was told of the improved ransom.

It was then, according to Mrs. Nwoke, she was directed by the suspect to come to Owerri, in Isiala Ngwa South LGA, to drop the money and pick her daughter.

The woman, eager to have her daughter back at all costs, moved to the agreed venue in the middle of the night, but, on reaching the venue, she was again directed to go to Mgboko Amiri community about 15 kilometres from the former place, and she complied.

At Mgboko Amiri, she said a voice told her to keep the money under a particular spot beside a bush and then go to Umuikaa Junction, in Isiala Ngwa South, almost the same place they had asked her to drop the money earlier, to pick Chioma.

With that back-and-forth journey, as Mrs. Nwoke was going to Umuikaa Junction with all her mind focused on seeing her missing daughter, something unpleasant happened. Her daughter's abductors made a fresh demand, calling and telling her on phone to bring another N1.5m.

After this demand for Mrs. Nwoke, Chioma's number stopped connecting and the person stopped calling the woman, as she narrated.

The confused lady said she was sometime in September, invited by the DSS to bring pictures



•Ndife

of her daughter, to help in their investigations, which she complied with.

However, weeks after submitting her daughter's pictures, the woman said she was invited by leaders of The Apostolic Church and officials of the DSS, who opened up to her that her daughter had been killed and her lifeless body found at Umunakanu Mbano, Imo State.

The heartbroken woman stated that, when the body of her daughter was discovered, she was already decaying, while the head gear of the victim was still tied around her neck. She added that the daughter's corpse was dumped in a shallow pit in an upside-down position.

To the surprise of Mrs. Nwoke, the suspect

ed killer of her daughter, as was revealed later, was Chukwunyerere, a member of her church who was made a deacon the same day with her, on August 7, 2021.

"Because of her decomposing corpse, she was buried after discovery but, to my surprise, the killer of my daughter was later revealed to be Salem Chukwunyerere, a member of my church."

"The kidnap and murder suspect was among those ordained deacon by The Apostolic Church on August 7, 2021."

If Mrs. Nwoke is grieving over the callous murder of her daughter, she is at the same time lamenting that her late daughter was, some years ago, suspended by her church for getting pregnant out of wedlock. She said that the boy she gave birth to is now in secondary school.

"I spent all my money while searching for my daughter. I was nearly crushed by a fast-moving car on my way to DSS office in Owerri. Now, where will I get the money to train this boy after the death of his mother? Who will train this child? Who will take care of my needs like my dear Chioma?" she lamented.

Chukwunyerere, the deacon from the pit of hell, in a confessional statement to security operatives, said he was a plumber by profession and before the incident he worshipped at The Apostolic Church, 55, Awolowo Street, Umuahia, where he served as a Sunday School teacher and also in the media department.

The alleged serial killer equally confessed that he was in prison between 2015 and 2020, for allegedly being involved in the murder of one Mrs. Tochi Iweka. He said the case was later dropped for lack of diligent prosecution because the complainant did not show further interest in the matter.

Chukwunyerere, who was arrested on October 3, 2021, on Awolowo Street on his way to church for the murder of Mrs. Ndife, confessed that he sold the woman's two Infinite phones for N24,000 and N6,500, respectively, at Isigate, Umuahia.

He equally told interrogators that the Spark 7 Tecno phone found on him belonged to Chioma Nwoke whom he also murdered.

The Apostolic Church is not taking the claim by the suspect that he is a pastor of the church as reported by a newspaper (not The Sun).

Denying that Chukwunyerere was a pastor of the Apostolic Church, the church, in a release signed by its secretary, Elder Frank Irole, said: "The leadership of The Apostolic Church, Nigeria (TACN), No. 55, Awolowo Street, Umuahia, has distanced herself from the claims of one Salem Chukwunyerere who is involved in multiple cases of conspiracy, kidnapping and murder and claims to be a pastor of the church."

While stating that the suspect was not a pastor of the church as he claimed, the release regretted that the (suspect's) claims, which were not false, have embarrassed the church and dragged its hard-earned image in the mud; it gave the newspaper 14 days to retract and apologize to the church or face legal action.

The church said it condemns in its entirety the wicked act of murder, which Chukwunyerere has confessed to be involved in, stating that life is so sacred and sacrosanct that even an unbeliever in Christ should not contemplate taking life.

Thanking God for the culprit's exposure and and security operatives for a job well done, the church urged the security agencies to do more investigation to unravel other accomplices of the said Chukwunyerere and ensure that none of them goes scot-free.

Meanwhile, the suspect has been arraigned before a high court sitting at Umuahia, Abia State, and slammed with a three-count charge of strangling a 45-year-old housewife, Virginia Ndife, to death, and for abducting and murdering another lady, Chioma Nwoke.

The case was adjourned till May 24, 2022.



•Njemanze

marketplace where He carved wood"). When Jesus started His ministry, there was a lot of uproar because of the miracles and teachings along river Nwaorie (Igbo language: Nwa Orie, meaning, 'Son of the Almighty God') at Amakohia (Igbo language: ama a ko ohia, meaning, 'wisdom that is told by the bushside') and Akwakuma (Igbo language: akwa a ko ama, meaning, 'wisdom told on the bridge'). Along this river, Jesus met the fisherman Peter (Igbo language: pa aty Orie, meaning, 'you have the instructions of God' in his confession of Jesus as Son of God) who loaned Him his boat and then was ordered to spread the fishing net (Igbo language: ubu mmiri) and caught the miraculous fishes. This is why Owerri people do not fish at Nwa Orie river to this day. Peter abandoned the net with fishes there (Igbo language: e mee a ghara) and fell prostrate at Egbada (Igbo language: e gbee daa, meaning 'fell prostrate'). The area to this day is called Ubummiri. Peter had all his kindred follow Jesus and they are called Umyabali (Igbo language: umyaba

Eli, meaning, 'community that followed the Spirit of the Most High'). The miracles of Jesus caused some elders in Owerri to say that it could be a reason for insurrection against the white Romans (Igbo language: oru ama enu, meaning, 'slave people from the northern settlements') and reprisal attacks on the whole communities. They reasoned that it was better that the Romans kill only Jesus. The elder Pharisee advised (Igbo language: na-efiri ibe a ko, meaning, 'gossiped on his kinsman' to the authorities) his kindred Umuorono (Igbo language: umu oru njo, meaning, 'this community that came up with the conspiracy') supported by Umuodu (Igbo language: umu odu, meaning, 'community that gave the advice'), Umuiche (Igbo language: umu e che, meaning, 'community that guarded His tomb') and Umuoyima (Igbo language: umu e nye ama, meaning 'community that revealed where He was') of the five kindreds that make up Owerri nchi ise (Igbo language: Owe eri na-echi isi / zara Eli, meaning 'the leaders from time immemorial that crown the king of Israel').

At Jesus's trial by the Chief Priest at the Temple of Solomon (Igbo language: isi ulu Ama Enu, meaning, 'main building of the High Church'), then at the area of the Government House Chapel, Owerri, which was the office of the resident head Pilate (Igbo language: pa odu a ty odu, meaning, 'has the responsibility of directing the people') and then the governor Herod (Igbo language: a hporo di isi, meaning, 'the chosen one at the top') at governor's office. The Jews called Egbu (Igbo language: e gbuo, meaning, 'crucify Him') and Awaka (Igbo language: a waa aka, meaning, 'pierce His hands') shouted for Jesus to be crucified at Ugwu Ekwema Arugo (Igbo language: ugwu ekwe oma aru ogo, meaning, 'hill at the skull shrine of the abomination of the district'). A Roman army conscript from Awaka shot an arrow into his side (Igbo language: o gba ube Nwa Chukwu, meaning, 'shot an arrow

at the Son of God') blood and water came out and the people exclaimed as the water dropped into the nearby river Otamiri (Igbo language: O ta mmiri, meaning, 'blood and water dropped'). Jesus body was taken for embalment by a Pharisee (Igbo language: onye a wu chi ori ojii, meaning, 'the person that applied black embalment ointment on God') and his friend (Igbo language: chi e do, meaning, 'he preserved the body of God'), both were local embalmers from the village of embalmers called Orjii (Igbo language: ori ojii, meaning, 'the black embalment ointment'). Jesus was buried at the Place of the Skull (Igbo language: ohia okpokoro isi) on Golgotha (Igbo language: ogologo odu, meaning, 'long bank of the river') at the present area of St. Mulumba Catholic Church, Owerri, along Wetheral Road. Three days later, He rose along with the people called Ekenakorrie (Igbo language: e kee oko Orie, meaning 'the regenerated men of God') who died 100 years earlier during the Maccabean revolt and were called Maccabees (Igbo language: e mee aka ebe Ose, meaning, 'bore witness to Almighty God').

The events of the Death of Jesus in Owerri are commemorated yearly as Oru Owerri (Igbo language: uru Owe Eri, meaning, 'the sorrow of the leaders from time immemorial') with roasted yam and fresh palm oil (Igbo language object form: ahuhu ji a kwaa mmanu elu, meaning, 'roasted yam with fresh oil'; subject expression: ahuhu e ji kwaa Mmanu Elu, meaning, 'the suffering which was used to wake the Person from Heaven'). After three days, there would be clearing of the path to the burial site called Obubo uzo (Igbo language subject expression: O bubo a zo, meaning, 'the killing that brought about salvation'). All communities and places bear the names given with the events of the Life of Jesus of Owerri as a mark of penitential rites [Ephesians 3:14-15].