

## FEATURES

# Murder in the cathedral: Machete-wielding men hack boy to death on church premises



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Augustine Ogbu, 15, a Catholic Altar Server at Obodo Ogbeni village, Umuoguduakpu community in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, came back from church with his family members and decided to visit his namesake, his father's brother. He decided to accompany his father's brother's children to a Methodist Church in the Obodo Ogbeni for the church band's practice session. As the band practice progressed, the that generator provided light for the activity went off while those inside the church did not know the church premises had been surrounded by machetewielding men. Immediately, one of the band boys went outside to know what happened to the generator but he was attacked while other attackers moved into the church proper and unleashed terror on the people inside.

But Augustine Ogbu could not survive the attack as severe machete cuts were inflicted on him causing his death. His head was almost cut off from his body. The incident occurred about 9:pm. Ogbu is fifth child in the family of eight children. About seven persons received serious machete cuts in the night attack.

They are currently receiving treatment at Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki 2 (FETHA 2) and undisclosed hospital in Ngbo Court axis of the village. It was alleged that the day before the incident occurred, there was a thanksgiving in the area attended by people within and outside the village and some group of youths fought with machetes during entertainment on the occasion.

There had been some cult killings in Ohaukwu Local Government Area with over five persons killed before the current killing. Reuben Abah, Ogbu's father told Saturday Telegraph that cultist members were responsible for his son's gruesome murder. He described the deceased as peace-loving and a dedicated Christian who devoted most of his time to God and wondered why his life was cut short. Abah said: "The truth of the matter is that my son was killed, his name is Augustine Ogbu and he was 15 years because he was born in 2003.

On September 2, being a Sunday, I came back from where I went to in the night and when he told me that he wanted to go to my elder brother's house who is his namesake and also lives in this village. I told him to go and he went about 5:pm in the evening. "About 10:15pm of that day, I received message that my son was dead. He went to my elder brother's house and together with his children they went to Methodist Church in our village for band practice.

"They told me that the generator that was put on for the practice went off and when one of those practicing with my son went out to bring the generator inside the church he was attacked with machete. They told me that the church was immediately invaded that night by hoodlums and everybody scampered for safety. Our local vigilante immediately gathered and started looking for the invaders and arrested some of them and that is the thing I knew about the matter. "When I got to the church, I saw my son's corpse lying on the ground. When the matter was reported to the police, they came in the morning and carried his corpse to the mortuary after taking his pictures.

I also followed the police to the mortuary where the corpse was deposited; he is now in the mortuary. He was almost beheaded, only a tiny thread was holding the head from being entirely severed off. "But what happened was that we later got information that someone did a thanksgiving in a Catholic Church in this our village. They were playing

music till night and many people within and outside our community attended the thanksgiving.

“I would say that the killing of my son and the attack on those that sustained injuries was as a result of the thanksgiving in that church because a lot of people said they saw people wielding machetes and fighting during entertainment after the thanksgiving. In the night, they killed my son when they attacked the Methodist Church.

“Some arrests have been made by our local vigilantes through a tip-off and handed over to the police because one of the victims said he was attacked but was lucky as the machete did not cut him so much. Our local vigilante asked him whether he could identify the person that attacked him and he said yes and led the vigilante to the person who was arrested. Some others were arrested. Later more arrests were made. “One of the suspects was arrested in Anambra State and is now in police net. On that day of the thanksgiving, that suspect who also attended the event left the village immediately which caused suspicion and he was arrested.

Those behind the killing of my son are cultist members according to the vigilante that arrested them. “I am very sad over my son’s killing because that my boy was not a bad person and none of my children is a bad person. The boy was a very quiet and peaceful person who didn’t foment trouble.

This sad incident that befell me has made me realise my standing in the public because a lot of people including those I don’t know have been given good testimonies about me and my family. We are committed Christians and we don’t foment trouble. Those that killed my son will never know peace because he did not commit any crime, he was a good boy and was very committed to serving God. “It is unfortunate that cultism has been taken lives in this our village and parents are not helping matters because they don’t reprimand their children or monitor them. If my child is doing something bad I will make sure I do what I am supposed to do to stop such bad conduct.

I will personally use my hand and handle him or her. “Many parents are now afraid of correcting their children for fear of being killed by their children if they try to reprimand them. There is this man in our village who is currently hospitalised. His son attacked him with cutlass and

nearly killed him. People asked him what happened and who was responsible but he said he doesn't know who attacked him. People should speak up against evil in our village to stop all these cult activities. "The most annoying thing is that a man whose child was among those arrested over my son's murder immediately came to the police station to bail him; he didn't waste time to seek his bail. It is not supposed to be like this." On her part, mother of the deceased, Mary Abah, said: "On that 2nd of this month we returned from Church and he (my son) said he wanted to go to my husband's brother house.

From there, my son followed his uncle's children to Methodist Church for band practice. "While they were there in the night practicing they were attacked but my son was the one that was killed while five persons who were among those inside the church received serious machete cuts. There was no way my son could have survived because he was sliced like meat. "I was even asleep when the whole thing happened and my husband was on night duty as a security person in our village. People contacted him when the thing happened". Our correspondent who visited the scene, observed heavy presence of local vigilante men from Ngboejiogu central security in the area following the attack even as tension mounts in the village.

The security men were heavily armed when Saturday Telegraph visited the Methodist Church which also serves as schools: nursery, primary and secondary. One of the security men who was armed with Pump Action and who did not want his name in print said: "We are members of Ngboejiogu central security.

We were invited here to guard this place because of the tension arising from what happened. There is fear because of what happened.

"Actually, the information we got is that people were practicing in this church and light went off and they were attacked. "We came to this place around 2:am when the incident happened. We arrested some persons and they had been handed over to the police. Some other persons had been arrested this morning ( September 19). "We are deeply disturbed about the fragile security situation in my local government area. Although the council was seen before now as one of the security flashpoints in the state, the security situation in the council lately has assumed a frightening dimension and as such needs immediate attention and action from all concerned."

When contacted, the village chairman Igwe Raphael expressed shock over the attack. He stated that the incident was planned and executed by the attackers and vowed that the perpetrators would be brought to book. Raphael dismissed the insinuation that the incident arose from a misunderstanding traditionalists and church goers had in the past as according to him, the misunderstanding had since been resolved and everything in order in the village. He said: "It is true that this incident happened here and it happened in the Methodist church. The truth of the matter is that it happened. We see this incident as the handiwork of those within our neighbourhood.

We are confused and that is why we rallied round to know how it happened and those responsible for this dastardly act. "Investigation has commenced and we the villagers have vowed that we must investigate this because we are confused and very sad that children who were in the church practicing with their drums could be attacked like this. "This attack was planned because it happened before our local vigilante commenced work that very day. We are investigating this to know the people behind this heinous crime in our land.

"There is no conflict between Christians and traditionalists in my place. There was a time the two groups were having problems that I had since resolved. I met with leaders of churches and traditionalists in my village and we resolved the crisis and agreed on a particular time masquerade could paraded in the village. Masquerades always parade in the night instead of morning and that is why there were problems in our village." However, authorities of the Methodist Church refused to speak to Saturday Telegraph. When contacted, the state Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Loveth Odah said she was yet to be briefed on the matter.