



The increasing spate of kidnap and murder in the eastern part of the country took another dimension recently as a clergyman, David Odukwe, was allegedly kidnapped by the Bishop of the Church. But as family and friends made concerted efforts to ensure that the pastor regained his freedom, the kidnapers dumped his corpse in front of the Church, Eugene Agha writes

Family members and friends of late Pastor David Odukwe who was allegedly kidnapped seven months ago by his General Overseer, (names withheld), have not come to terms with his gruesome murder by unknown assassins and the alleged involvement of his bishop in the entire saga. The Odukwe family of Oraifite, in Ekwusigbo local government area of Anambra State is yet to grapple with the bitter reality of the sudden exit of their promising young pastor and father of one.

But more intriguing in the matter is the blatant refusal of the Church authorities to release the body of the deceased pastor to members of his family for burial. The deceased's elder brother, Chief Andrew Odukwe told THISDAY that it is annoying to hear about the refusal of the Church authorities to let go the corpse, but more annoying is the alleged involvement of the General Overseer of the Church and his wife in the murder case.

The police at Zone 9, Umuahia, have since stepped into the matter and have vowed to unearth the cause of death of the young pastor. The deceased's relations are questioning the rationale behind the transfer of the case file from 33, Divisional Headquarters, where the incident was originally reported, when investigations had barely commenced.

Meanwhile, Police sources stated that seven months after Pastor David was kidnapped while taking the General Overseer's children to school, the wife of the bishop allegedly gave a graphic confession of how they plotted the kidnap while on her sick bed before she eventually died.

Until his gruesome murder by yet-to-be ascertained suspected assassins, Pastor Dave served with the Grace of God Mission Church located at Nsugbe Road, Anambra State and was to be consecrated a Bishop on March 4, 2009 by the Church's General Overseer, Bishop Paul Nwachukwu, before the sad incident.

The source alleged that the Bishop's wife revealed that it was herself and her husband that actually plotted the kidnap of the deceased so as to prevent him from marrying their daughter. The source also said before she died she repeatedly begged God for forgiveness and that their original intention was not to kill the clergyman, but that it was the kidnapers who did not handle the matter very well.

Interestingly, the Police Public Relations Officer, Anambra State Police Command, Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Emeka, who confirmed the murder of Pastor Odukwe, however said he was aware that the Bishop's wife had died, but that what he could not confirm was the alleged confession of the woman before she died.

But the deceased's elder brother, Chief Andrew Odukwe told THISDAY that the plans of the family were to give their late brother a proper burial.

He stated further that, even though the autopsy report conducted on the deceased clearly showed that he was strangled to death by his captors, the Church has refused to release the corpse of the late pastor for burial.

He stated that the fact that the deceased served and died in the Church does not make him a slave to the Church.

Horror as Kidnapped Pastor is Murdered



• Front view of the Church

A member of the Church who spoke to THISDAY on the condition of anonymity said nothing could have been more ungodly than for a man to grab a defenceless servant of God, tied his legs and had him murdered few metres from his Church in cold blood just two weeks to his consecration as Bishop. The member stated that as doubtful as the matter may sound, it was the cruel fate that befell Pastor Odukwe on February 26, 2009.

The deceased who was said to be in his forties was originally trained as a trader who deals on electronics. He was said to have listened to God's calling which asked him to drop his business to serve him.

However, if the deceased had the premonition that he was going to be killed by those he adored he might have rejected the alleged request by his General Overseer to return to the country and stayed put at Cote d'Ivoire, where he was pasturing his own Church, Mount Olives Church, having left the Grace of God Mission Church earlier.

Perhaps also, Pastor Dave yielded innocently to his G.O.'s request of consecrating him a Bishop if he accepted his demand of coming down to Nigeria as well as ceding his Church in Cote d'Ivoire to a branch of the Grace of God Mission Church which has already been renamed in French translation to Mission Internationale La Grace de Dieu because of the promise of being consecrated a Bishop.

Narrating the circumstances that led to the painful death of Pastor Dave to THISDAY the eldest brother, who was flanked by other members of the family including Chief Fidel Ejimba Odukwe, the chairman of the family in Lagos, insisted that a top member of the Grace of God Mission Church has questions to answer because of the manner through which the news of the death of his younger brother was relayed to him.

"I want to state here that I am ready to go to any length to say this. A top member of the Church, Grace of God Mission (names withheld) has a case to answer over the death of my brother. Apart from this, the manner in which his death was relayed to me and other members of the family was most ungodly and barbaric.

"On February 26, 2009 at about 12.55pm, I received a call from somebody who introduced himself as Evangelist Kingsley Cornel Uwagwu, the administrator of the church saying that Pastor David was missing. He said my brother was kidnapped along side the grand children of the Bishop while he was taking them to the school on February 24, 2009 by unknown persons and that they were already in Port Harcourt. He further said that they demanded for N30m. Before I could utter a word, he said, 'in short, Pastor David is dead and as I speak to you now, his body is in the mortuary'. I screamed and said, how could that be?

"Moments after, the wife of the Bishop called Chief Odukwe, my brother and told him the same story but she said the kidnapers demanded for N20m instead of the N30m earlier reported by the administrator of the Church. This inconsistency made us wonder about the veracity of their claims. Quickly, I called my senior brother, Chief Andrew Odukwe who also expressed surprise over the sad incident and the following day, we held a meeting on what to do.

"On February 28, 2009, we, including the family lawyer, Mr. Akanike Abebe set off to Onitsha to see things for ourselves. When we got there, we did not introduce the lawyer as such. At the Church, we requested an audience with the Bishop but the administrator said we could not see him as he was far away in Enugu holding a crusade. We felt that was absurd!

"How could a pastor of the Church and an in-law be lying in the morgue and the only important thing for the Bishop to do was to hold a crusade? We left him in anger and went to the 33 Police Division to see if the matter was ever reported. At the police station, we met with the DPO who told us that the matter had been transferred to Awka. For us, it was another drama. From there, we went to the morgue where we saw the remains of Pastor Dave and we could not believe what we saw," the senior Ndukwe stated.

The eldest brother of the deceased added further: "Perhaps, you may want to know that I trained David from childhood to the level that he became a man. He trained as electronics merchant and I opened a shop for him in Onitsha. It was while he was in Onitsha that he met with the Bishop and told me that he had given his life to God."

In search of a Missing Son

What will I tell my late husband's relations about the whereabouts of their brother's son? Will I tell them that their late brother's 16 year-old son who allegedly followed one Mr. Oni to Ijebu Igbo, Ogun State, has been killed or that he may soon emerge from where he had gone to since June 27? These were the heart-rending words of Mrs. Comfort Ogugura when she stormed the office of the Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Superintendent of Police (SP), Frank Mba, armed with a petition alleging a cover-up against police officers attached to Igbogbo Police Station, Ikorodu, last Friday.

In her confused state, but still coherent, Mrs. Comfort Ogugura, 42, a widow narrated how her 15 year-old son, Chima, was allegedly deceived, and subsequently taken to Ijebu-Igbo, Ogun State, on June 27, by one Oni for reasons best known to him. She alleged that the suspect may have used her son for ritual purposes.

She called on the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Ogborna Onovo to help her get to the circumstances that led to the sudden disappearance of Chima. She said if the police stepped into the matter with the urgency it required, her son might be rescued alive.

Meanwhile, three weeks after, the 42 year-old widow stated that she has not set her eyes on her son whom neighbours have alleged had accompanied Oni to Ogun State on that fateful day.

Struggling to stop the tears that flooded down her face, Comfort told THISDAY that the police at Igbogbo, in Ikorodu area are not helping matters as she accused them of conniving with the suspect to evade justice.

"My son was kidnapped and presumed murdered by Mr. Oni on June 27, 2009, while policemen attached to Igbogbo Police Station had freed him, whereas I am still in pains and bitterness," she said.

By Eugene Agha

The widow and mother of 7, continued: "We live in the same neighbourhood along with the suspect on the same street, Adetu Street by Cemetery Road, Ikorodu. I was told that he requested my son to accompany him to Ijebu-Igbo, during which he insisted that some many other neighbours are expected to go along with them.

"Elated by the trip, my son told her elder sister, Chidinma, same story," she added.

Also, because he never had any premonition that danger was lurking around the corner, Chima, narrated same to some of his playmates, including one Olumide, saying that they were going along with neighbours.

She claimed that Olumide and Ahmed saw her son leaving in company of Oni in a car. "When I came back from work that Saturday night to meet my son's absence, I requested from Chidinma where he had gone to. I was afraid since nobody told me earlier that day of the trip, but kept hoping that they will be back the next day," she added.

Comfort told THISDAY that when on the next day she still could not find her son, she went in search of the suspect, but that surprisingly he claimed not to know Chima. She said that she became suspicious and immediately raised an alarm.

She told all who cared to listen to her plight that the most painful aspect of the entire saga was that, the police after obtaining statement from Olumide and Ahmed arrested the suspect but allowed him to go even before investigations commenced.

The Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mba told THISDAY that investigations into the matter was already on and that the Command would do all within its power to get to the root of the matter.

He wondered how could an adult so deceive a child out of their state of domicile to another without the consent of his parents.

Mba gave the woman a written note to the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) on the need for him to look into the matter. He advised parents and guardians to be careful of those who come around their children.

He stated that so many cases of child kidnap have been traced to family members and friends, who may at times, trick their victim out without the knowledge the child's parents.

• Chima... whereabouts remain a mystery