

# 'Pastor killed my elder brother with knife he stole from our residence'

- Items started missing in our house when my brother gave him spare key
- What we saw — Residents
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By Chioma Onuegbu

**T**HE gruesome murder of 23-year-old Gabriel Edward Bassey, a final year student of Civil Engineering, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, by a supposed pastor of a Pentecostal Church has generated uproar in the state, particularly with rumored attempts at cover-up by some privileged persons.

Saturday Vanguard gathered that the deceased, a native of Akai Ubium village, Nsit Ubium Local Government Area, of the state, was killed in cold blood on Monday, December 21, 2020 in his room at Ifa Ikot Uboh community, Uyo Local Government Area.

Family sources revealed that police detectives arrested the pastor after the evidence they found in the course of preliminary investigation pointed to the fact that he was the prime suspect in the murder.

## How the deceased was killed —younger brother

The deceased's younger brother, Emmanuel Edward Bassey, a store keeper at a primary school in Uyo, who spoke to Saturday Vanguard, last Thursday, narrated how it happened: "I was living with Gabriel, my elder brother in Ifa Ikot Uboh, Ifa Ikot Okpon, Etoi in Uyo before he died. We moved into the house in July, 2020. It was built by my late mother. Gabriel partitioned it and we rented out the hall to a church after the senior pastor agreed to pay N150, 000 a year for the hall. Then the church assigned a pastor to the place.

"But a week after the pastor started using the place, he approached my brother to allow him keep his chairs in our apartment as he

did not want the chairs to be stolen. My brother agreed without suspecting anything and whenever the church wanted to hold their Sunday service, my brother would have to come back from wherever he went to open our apartment for them to remove their chairs. But because of the inconvenience, he decided to give the pastor a spare key to our apartment.

## Household items started disappearing

"From the time the pastor collected the spare key, things started missing in our house. First was my modem, then my late mother's wrappers, plates, cutlery, even food items. Before the pastor was given the spare key nothing was stolen from the house. Initially we did not suspect the pastor, but a week after he was given the spare key he came to tell us that the key was missing. Then one day we discovered that the remaining raw rice we had in a bag had disappeared. My brother became convinced that the pastor was the one stealing from us because the rice disappeared few days after he took the pastor into our kitchen to give him raw rice and groundnut oil. One day, my brother said he went to the senior pastor to report about things missing from our apartment. My brother now asked the pastor to stop keeping his chairs in our apartment. And when Gabriel changed the key to our apartment, things stopped missing.

"On December, 18, 2020, my brother and I left for work and that was the last day I saw him. He called me on phone when I returned from work that he would be spending the night in town to complete an urgent work. And the next day, Saturday, 19, 2020 I traveled to spend the Christmas with my aunty.

On Monday December 21, I tried to contact my brother from my aunty's place, but his mobile phone was switched off. When I could not contact him till Wednesday December 23, I became worried, I decided to contact some of our neighbors who told me they had not seen him around our house, and that our gate was locked. So I thought he may have traveled because he had told me that he would be traveling during that period," he said.

Continuing, Emmanuel said he had wondered why his brother would travel without telling him and their dad who lived elsewhere, adding that when he contacted their father, he said Gabriel also told him he would be traveling to Ogoja, Cross River State, but the father advised him not to travel during the festive period.

## Finding

Emmanuel said he and the father did not know Gabriel never traveled until that Saturday December 26, when he decided to go to their house to check, only to find out that he had been murdered.

"That Saturday, after the Police removed the body from the room, they discovered the knife his killer used, and it was my late mother's chopping knife which was among the household items that were missing. The killer cut him on his head, shoulder and stomach. He was buried immediately because the body had started decomposing," he noted.

## Residents relate experience

Some residents of the community who recounted how they were jolted, Monday, December 21, 2020, when they heard very loud screaming of 'Jesus, Jesus' from the house, said they were terrified as they had never experienced such incident in the area before.

One of them who spoke on ground of anonymity, said: "When we confronted the pastor that day, he said that he was working on the ceiling of the church hall and that he

fell down and sustained injury, that was why he was shouting 'Jesus, Jesus'. But when he was asked to come out from the compound so that we could help him treat his wounds, he refused. We did not doubt what he told us because we knew him to be a pastor."

## Intrigues

Due to the unfolding intrigues, some members of UNIUYO alerted the State House of Assembly over alleged moves to compromise the investigation, which a human rights Lawyer, Inibehe Effiong, corroborated.

Effiong noted that police at "E" Division, Shelter Afrique, had arrested and released the prime suspect until the Commissioner of Police was petitioned and he was rearrested and detained at Command headquarters.

While describing the killing as horrific and very tragic, Effiong said, "Though I have not been very pleased the way the investigation has been carried out, especially when the case was at police "E" Division, Shelter Afrique, they basically did not do anything. The evidence I have seen, the investigation I have carried out so far clearly showed that there is a reason the pastor is seen as a prime suspect.

"I have been doing my best to assist the police in investigating the matter, but there are pressures on them because the mother of the prime suspect is a police inspector. She has also been running helter-skelter to shield her son. All that we want is for the police to do proper investigation and prosecute the culprit. The deceased was someone I have known since 2016. He was disciplined, always married to his books and church activities," he said.

## House of Assembly wades in

Representative of Nsit Ubium constituency, Hon Otobong Bob, had in a motion at last Tuesday plenary, noted with serious concern attempts being made to compromise ongoing investigations and circumvent justice for his constituent and the family. The House of Assembly accordingly, passed a resolution, directing the Commissioner of Police and the State Attorney-General to ensure a thorough and swift investigation into the matter and ensure that the culprit was diligently prosecuted.

Police Public Relations Officer, Akwa Ibom Police Command, Mr. Odiko MacDon, did not respond to calls and text messages sent to his phone at press time.