

George Manneh Weah takes helm in Liberia from fellow Methodist president

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf handed over power in the West African nation's first peaceful transition in decades.

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President George Manneh Weah of Liberia delivering his inaugural address on January 22, 2018. Photo by E Julu Swen / United Methodist News Service.

The recent transfer of power between United Methodists in Liberia involved presidents, not bishops.

George Manneh Weah, a former soccer star, stepped into his role leading the West African nation on January 22, taking over from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in the first peaceful transition in decades. Both belong to the United Methodist Church.

Weah was elected by more than 61 percent of the vote during a December 26 presidential runoff election, facing Joseph Boakai.

Samuel J. Quire Jr., bishop of Liberia, called on the nation's people to work with the government to move the country forward. He challenged Weah to address young people especially, noting that those who supported Weah's presidential bid did not sound reconciliatory after Weah was declared the winner.

"I will roll up my sleeves to join the new government to do whatever I can to disabuse the minds of our young people in this country of the vices that do not represent peace," Quire said December 31 during a program at First United Methodist Church in Monrovia, where Sirleaf is a member. All Liberians are needed "to ensure that the peace that we are enjoying now is not disturbed."

Tehpamubo Sayeh, senior pastor of Georgia Pattern United Methodist Church, where Weah is a member, said Weah has contributed greatly, including help with maintaining the 113-year-old church, especially after the Liberian civil war.

"He calls me every time he is going to worship with another church, just to let me know that he is not staying away from church service," Sayeh said.

When Sirleaf became Liberia's leader in 2006, she was the first woman to be elected president of an African nation. The nation had seen two civil wars, 1989-1996 and 1999-2003. She worked to restore the country's infrastructure and maintain peace and security.

"I am proud to say we have moved Liberia from a failed state, from an awful flicker on your television screen, to a success story," she said in 2008, addressing the United Methodist General Conference, the global decision-making body that gathers every four years.

In 2011 Sirleaf received the Nobel Peace Prize along with two other women activists. She stressed that women and men alike must not be afraid to denounce injustice and demand peace.

"If I might thus speak to girls and women everywhere, I would issue them this simple invitation: My sisters, my daughters, my friends, find your voices!" —United Methodist News Service

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