

Retired army officer will be Nigeria's new primate: Orogodo Okoh to succeed Peter Akinola

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The Church of Nigeria has chosen a 57-year-old retired lieutenant colonel from the Nigerian army, Archbishop Nicholas Orogodo Okoh, as its new primate to lead some 20 million Anglicans in the west African country.

Okoh was elected September 15 by the country's Anglican bishops. Some Nigerian Anglicans say their new leader is strongly opposed to the ordination of women and homosexuals—as is retiring archbishop Peter Akinola, whom Okoh will succeed in March 2010.

"I am grateful to God and to the Church of Nigeria, particularly our laymen, clergy and House of Bishops, for thinking that I can do it," Okoh said in his acceptance speech. "It is a lot of confidence reposed in me, and I pray to God not to allow me to fail."

An official in the Asaba diocese, who preferred to remain anonymous, told ENI that Okoh's leadership style was unlikely to be much different from that of Akinola, as they share similar views on many issues concerning the church.

Akinola has supported some dissident Anglican parishes in the U.S. as a missionary wing of the Nigerian-based church structure. The U.S. Episcopal Church has termed Akinola's actions as interference in crossing jurisdictional lines.

The incoming primate is chair of the theological resource group of the Global Anglican Future Conference, or GAFCON, which describes itself as a group of "confessing Anglicans whose goal is to reform, heal and revitalize the Anglican Communion, and expand its mission to the world."

GAFCON, which has strong backing in African, Asian and Caribbean countries, acts as a pressure group in the 77-million-strong Anglican Communion, which is riven by

those opposing or supporting the ordination of female or gay clergy.

Okoh is currently the bishop of Asaba and archbishop of Bendel Province. Following his election, he said that the Anglican church in Africa's most populous nation would continue to take the lead in spreading the gospel.

The new primate-elect, who is also the current chair of the Nigeria Christian Pilgrims Commission, was ordained as a priest in 1979. He became a bishop in 2001 and was appointed as archbishop of Bendel in 2005.

Akinola hailed Okoh's election, saying, "I have no doubt of his pedigree; that was why this hall erupted in celebration the moment he emerged." *Ecumenical News International*