

Disciples reelect Watkins to second term

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The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has reelected Sharon Watkins as head of the denomination, capping off a weeklong assembly that mixed mundane church business with hot-button issues such as homosexuality, immigration and anti-Muslim hate speech.

Watkins, who had completed one six-year term as general minister and president, spoke before the vote, reflecting on her previous leadership and laying out a vision for the future of the church as it struggles with internal debates.

"We need to talk honestly about the gospel message as it relates to race and sexual orientation in our church," she said. "We've been at a stalemate for too long." The Indianapolis-based Disciples denomination, a frequent ecumenical collaborator with the United Church of Christ, has about 700,000 members nationwide.

During the July 9-13 assembly in Nashville, Tennessee, church delegates passed several resolutions, including an overture denouncing anti-Muslim hate speech. "[The church] condemns anti-Muslim speech and activity and calls upon the church to promote respect, civility and love toward our Muslim neighbors," the resolution reads.

During the assembly, Watkins led an evening prayer vigil in the streets of Nashville for immigration reform. "Emergent" author and activist Brian McLaren urged Disciples to be forward-thinking and not "consumed by the unclean spirit of nostalgia." —RNS