

# AME Church elects more women bishops: New African leadership too

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The African Methodist Episcopal Church, after electing its first woman bishop four years ago, raised two more females to the episcopacy this month at its quadrennial meeting in Indianapolis. They also elected an unprecedented three native African bishops as a sign of AME commitment to indigenous leadership on that continent.

“The election of Bishop Vashti [McKenzie] four years ago cracked that stained-glass ceiling that many denominations have been struggling with,” said Mike McKinney, spokesman for the denomination. The two new women bishops, who won in balloting July 6, are Carolyn Tyler Guidry, a presiding elder from Los Angeles, and Sarah Frances Davis, a minister in San Antonio. Delegates also elected three male U.S. bishops.

In addition to being one of three women in the denomination’s top ranks, McKenzie began serving as president of the AME Church’s Council of Bishops at the meeting. “That means that she is the first woman bishop in any of the black church traditions to be the titular head of the church,” said Bishop John Hurst Adams, the senior AME bishop who retired on the meeting’s close July 7 when the new bishops were consecrated.

The new bishops for Africa are ministers Wilfred Messiah of South Africa, Paul J. M. Kawimbe of Zambia and David R. Daniels of Liberia.

The new African leadership is as significant as the advance of women in the denomination, some said. “We’ve raised the level of our commitment to be one church, to be really global, in that we have elected three from Africa,” said Bishop Vinton R. Anderson, chairperson of the General Conference Commission.

“We needed to free ourselves of being colonialists, black colonialists at that,” Anderson said. As in previous years, new bishops typically have a responsibility in a district that includes part of Africa. But appointing as many as three indigenous

Africans as new bishops was unparalleled.

“The AME Church, as a truly international church, is now truly international in its leadership,” said Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, professor of African-American studies and sociology at Colby College in Waterville, Maine.

Senator John Kerry, the presumed Democratic nominee for president, addressed the convention attended by more than 2,000 delegates and several thousand visitors. President Bush also was invited but declined, Anderson said. -*Religion News Service*