

Woman slated to lead Disciples of Christ: New president Sharon E. Watkins

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Sharon E. Watkins, a longtime leader of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has received the nod as the 770,000-member church's next president, which will make her the first female top executive of a mainline denomination.

Her nomination is expected to be approved by the Disciples' General Assembly July 23-27 in Portland, Oregon, said a church spokesperson. She was unanimously approved as the nominee April 17 by the board of directors of the Indianapolis-based church.

"I believe the church is blessed to have a leader like Sharon Watkins emerge," said Chris Hobgood, the denomination's outgoing general minister and president. "She is a very gifted leader and person of deep faith."

Watkins, 50, is currently senior minister of the Disciples Christian Church of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. She and her husband, Richard (Rick) H. Lowery, an Old Testament professor at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, have two adult children.

Watkins said she is honored to lead the denomination in what she called "a period of such exciting change and possibility." She noted, "As a lifelong Disciple, I know our church has a unique God-given mission for these times, a mission that has to do with the extravagant hospitality of the communion table."

She has held a number of denominational posts and once served as a missionary in the Republic of the Congo. She holds degrees from Phillips Seminary, Yale Divinity School and Butler University.