

First African woman elected to high World Council post

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An Anglican church leader from Kenya, who has served multiple religious posts in Africa and with the Geneva-based World Council of Churches, made ecumenical history on November 8 when she was elected unanimously as the new moderator of the WCC's Central Committee.

Agnes Abuom of Nairobi is the first woman and the first African chosen to head the 150-member Central Committee, the highest governing body of the WCC. The election came at the close of the 11-day WCC assembly, held in Busan, South Korea.

Abuom has worked largely on issues of economic justice, peace and reconciliation, according to World Council of Churches. "My open prayer is that we shall move forward together in [coming] years despite our diversities that have the potential to divide us," said Abuom, "and that the WCC will continue to remain an instrument for providing safe space for all who can come and share their hopes, aspirations and visions [including] a prophetic voice."

The first woman moderator of the worldwide body suggested that the WCC's current practice of seeking consensus "resonates very well with feminine decision-making processes."

Abuom was the African president for the WCC from 1999 to 2006. She also represented the Anglican Church of Kenya while serving on the WCC Executive Committee. She is copresident of Religions for Peace and the National Council of Churches of Kenya.

Two vice-moderators were elected: United Methodist bishop Mary Ann Swenson of the United States and Gennadios of Sassima with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the latter serving a second term.

Swenson, who served as Methodist bishop of the Denver area from 1992 to 2000 and led the Los Angeles area in an extended episcopacy from 2000 to 2012, is

president of the Methodists' General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-religious Concerns.