

U.S. Assemblies of God elects first woman executive in more than a century

Donna L. Barrett is stepping into a top leadership role in the world's largest Pentecostal denomination.

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [May 23, 2018](#) issue



Donna Barrett addresses the Ohio Ministry Network. Photo by Ricardo Camacho/Ohio Ministry Network.

The top U.S. board of the Assemblies of God unanimously elected its first woman general secretary in the Pentecostal denomination's more than 100-year history.

Donna L. Barrett, 58, the lead pastor of a church in Independence, Ohio, will step into the third-ranking position in Assemblies leadership after general superintendent and assistant general superintendent, the denomination announced April 23. The religious body has 3.2 million adherents in the U.S. and 68 million worldwide, making it the largest Pentecostal denomination.

R. Marie Griffith, director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis, said that the Assemblies of God, founded in 1914, has had a “fascinating history” of women’s leadership, with women leading congregations and speaking from pulpits in its early days and later often finding their roles restricted.

In 2010, the General Presbytery, a policy-making body, determined that “we cannot find convincing evidence that the ministry of women is restricted according to some sacred or immutable principle.” Today 24 percent of Assemblies of God ministers are women.

“It’s taken eight years from that time to elect the first women to the AG Executive Leadership Team, so Donna Barrett’s election is a big deal,” said Griffith, author of *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*. “One could argue, however, that her election fits well with the denomination’s earliest history, even if women’s leadership was disrupted for some decades in between.”

Barrett, who was a paralegal before pursuing the ministry, has been an Assemblies of God minister since 1988 and has served on state and national organizations of the denomination.

“Through her service as a church planter, district leader, and general presbyter, Donna has shown humility paired with a special gifting for leadership,” said Doug Clay, general superintendent. “I’ve seen God use her time and time again to speak wisdom into difficult circumstances at the district and national level.”

In her role as general secretary, Barrett will oversee credentialing of ministers, chartering of churches, and collecting of official statistics. Her term begins on June 1.

“I’m humbled at this invitation to serve a fellowship I love,” Barrett said. “I look forward to what God has in his heart for the future of the Assemblies of God and I’m honored to be part of this outstanding team of leaders.”

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