

2021 Candidate Slate

For Senior Minister Search Committee

Bios & Photos

Emily Anderson



I am pleased to accept nomination to the Riverside Senior Minister Search Committee at this critical juncture in the life of the church and the community. I am under no illusion that this process will be smooth and easy, but I have a firm belief in the God of grace who has brought us this far. This belief and faith are what has kept me committed to service and sacrifice. Having quite a bit of experience in lay leadership at Riverside certainly qualifies me for the work ahead. In addition, my professional career in Social Work, Social Sciences, Mental Health and Educational Leadership and Administration has been successful and enriching. All of my experiences have led to expanding my intellect and have undergirded my spiritual growth and development.

I believe the next senior minister should be a person of deep faith who has a keen intellect and strong leadership ability. This person should also be a great preacher and caring pastor.

In my over 45 years of working with people I utilized my strong understanding of human behavior along with listening ability, patience and empathy. I believe in open, honest communication. This requires asking questions, seeking clarity, advocating, probing and caring. As chairperson of Faculty Senate at City University of New York, I led the governance of hundreds of very opinionated academicians. My leadership of the Senate involved decision-making which required reading hundreds of resumes; determining who merited interviewing and final hiring decisions. My leadership role also required clear communication of goals and an understanding of the relationships and competitions among various interest groups. The ability to think rationally, communicate clear ideas and show evidence to support these was critical to my success at gaining consensus.

As I think about the process of searching for our next senior minister and the process of discernment ahead, prayer, honesty, integrity, and resilience will be necessary to manage conflicts in a Christian way. I am confident that the search will be successful.

Alexa Donaphin



Alexa joined Riverside in the late 1990's. She has been an active lay leader since then, first serving as a member of the Mission & Social Justice Commission. She has also served on the Church Council, including terms as Vice Chair and Chair, the Building Committee both as a member and as Chair, the Conflict Resolution Design Team, the Institutional Relations Committee, the Senior Minister Committee, the Executive Committee, the Transition Team, and the Sustainability Task Force.

Through the years, Alexa has participated in congregational forums, staff interviews, Career Day panels, phone-banking, lay leadership retreats, and other church initiatives as well. She has volunteered with the Sojourners Ministry, the Poor Peoples' Campaign, and Lift Every Voice and Vote. In addition, she has been an active Riverside Church School teacher for nearly 20 years. Alexa is currently serving on the Riverside Development Committee and its Site Assessment Subcommittee. This year, she began her first term as an elected member of Riverside's Worship Commission, and she has been selected as the commission representative to the Budget & Planning Committee.

As a longtime Harlem resident, Alexa has been a community activist and a member and/or supporter of several Harlem-based organizations. She was the first president of the West 144th Street Landmark Block Association, and a board member of the Hamilton Heights Homeowners Association. She is a founding member of the Hamilton Heights-West Harlem Community Preservation Organization, and currently serves as its Vice President. Alexa also serves on the Board of Directors of Millennium Arts Salon, a non-profit organization based in Washington DC that seeks to advance cultural literacy through its arts programming. For more than a decade, she served on the Board of Directors of Louise Wise Services, a foster care and adoption agency which is no longer in existence.

A graduate of Howard and Harvard Universities, Alexa is a licensed architect who specializes in the planning and design of health care facilities.

Karissa Garner



It was my first-year as a seminary student whose classes were at Riverside I brought my son with me to attend classes at New York Theological Seminary. Reading the notices in the elevator, it was he who persuaded me to learn more about The Riverside Church (TRC) – he was motivated, curious, and excited about the possibility of participating in the church’s activities, which fed me as a mom, and later led us to become members and be baptized together.

Being of a diverse background, Puerto Rican and African American, living in Harlem for sixteen years and being in seminary here it meant a great deal to be connected with a diverse community life. I have made friends with many people in Riverside's church and the surrounding community, and I bring the lens of a mother, friend, neighbor, and seminarian. I would love to be a voice for the community.

I am interested in a Senior Minister who is open to nurturing the church community. A minister who embodies the spirit of Love. Someone who is educated, and whose education doesn’t stand in the way of relating to others. It is important that we have a senior minister that has a spirit of servitude, with a presence that can serve as the model for the congregation, as he/she discerns the needs of the church and its surrounding community.

We need a person who is opened minded and brave enough to try new things, while holding Riverside as a special place. We can break from our past and do even greater things that bears the imprint of the congregation. The next senior minister has to make TRC feel like everyone's church. I remember having an internship with the shower program and the pantry and seeing so many people that I never saw during service. I recognized neighbors and those from the unsheltered community that came for the social services and nothing more – I wondered why? The church as a whole has to make everyone who enters that church feels invited to worship.

I work through decisions by gathering information and prayer. It is valuable to ask questions to gain further insight. Once having those answers, we can collectively review and pray for guidance. God will lead us but we have to do our part. A committee gives us the benefit of different viewpoints. We must listen to each other and have an open mind. We are not always going to see eye to eye. That’s okay as long as we respect one another.

It is important to maintain decorum in roles of leadership. A space of peace and clarity has to been evoked. This environment gives way for free-flowing dialogue. Everyone's voice must be heard. Even if the voice is opposing your viewpoint. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2, ESV). God will guide this committee to make the appropriate decision for the next Senior Minister of the Riverside Church.

Lisa Hinds



In addition to my great love for Riverside, I bring a sense of energy, enthusiasm and drive that I believe will be a tremendous asset to the SMSC. My teenager will attest that my vibrancy is often contagious... and annoying! Though these are exhausting (and historic) times in the life of our world and our church, I am especially fueled by the song lyric “I ain’t in no ways tired”. More pragmatically though, I think critically; I write clearly; I listen before speaking; I believe that every voice must be heard; and I endeavor to see obstacles as opportunities.

While I believe our task as the Senior Minister Search Committee is to reflect the will and wishes of the community we serve, I am personally seeking a Senior Minister who will discern the Word prophetically, walk with Christ truthfully, do the radical work of social justice that Riverside is known for, empower the congregation to live into the fullness of Christ, and bring the fruit of the spirit to all they do. I further believe that stellar preaching is not something that you do; it’s something that you are. It is my prayer that Riverside’s next called Senior Minister will live their truth ... and lead the flock into do the same.

I am reminded that the work of the SMSC is not about me. I have no personal agenda; I have no dog in this race; I have absolutely no interest in using Riverside as a platform to further anything but the gospel. While I am not a biblical scholar, I believe I bring a pure heart and a clean spirit.

Having served last year on the search committee for a CEO for a UCC financial ministry, I have learned valuable lessons in objectivity of mission and the importance of a uniform set of pre-determined metrics. A clearly articulated and purpose-driven value set will go a long way in curbing the personal passions endemic to our community.

Diplomacy is a core strength. While I hold a Master’s of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, my diplomatic skills have been seasoned by many years as an institutional asset manager. Often my professional role puts me directly on the firing line of delivering bad news resulting from bad decisions to trusted partners. While this is never easy, I have been known to diffuse conflict and potentially contentious situations through radical accountability, brutal honesty, out-of-the-box creativity, and well-executed humor. Laughter heals! I believe I bring a light-hearted, yet authentic sense of kindness and caring to every encounter. Standing on James 1:19, being an engaged and active listener is key to who we have been called to be as Christians.

Annie Meredith



Annie Meredith is Deputy General Counsel and EEO Officer at the Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS), the agency that oversees the purchasing of goods and services for the City of New York. Annie believes that making local government more efficient and transparent increases access to justice for all and has worked in City government for the past decade.

Annie is supporting MOCS's development and roll-out of the Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (PASSPort) – the City's user-friendly, online procurement portal. In addition to supervising agency attorneys, she directs the teams accepting vendor integrity disclosure information required for contracting and built the agency's Risk Management approach to handling concerns to PASSPort and the broader procurement system.

Annie joined the Riverside Church in 2010 and currently serves as Secretary of the Sharing Fund Committee. She has volunteered with the youth group and served on the Education Commission. She is also passionate about voting rights, volunteering as an election monitor with the New York Democratic Lawyers Council and advocating for more progressive voting laws.

Annie holds a J.D. from CUNY School of Law and a B.A. in Religion from the College of William and Mary.

Lee Sartain



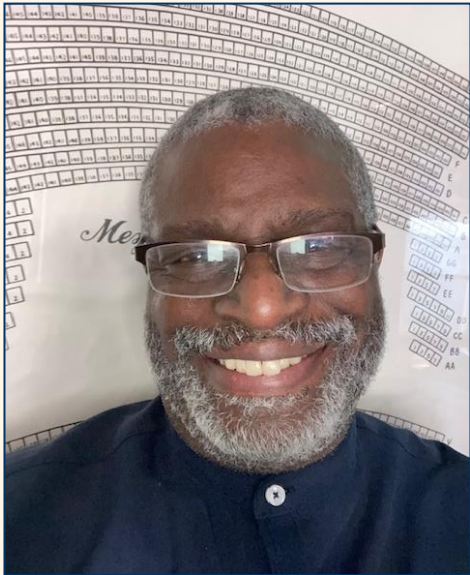
The qualities I possess that would be most helpful to the Senior Minister Search Committee are a passion and excitement about the future of Riverside. I serve on the Stewardship and Real Estate Assessment Committees. Additionally, I hold a Theology degree from Union, and have served a number of churches in part time staff roles. I have also served as a Board Member of the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists--which Riverside is a member of.

I desire a Senior Minister who is Christ Centered, Biblically Based, and Ministry Focused. Someone unconstrained in their vision, but strategic and realistic enough to know how to execute that vision in the world in which we live. Someone who has proven experience growing attendance and giving--they can provide quantitative evidence of their track record. Riverside cannot simply rely on the qualitative measures in a Senior Minister. The church must achieve a sustainable attendance level to sustain its ministry with the inherited constraints that our campus creates. Someone who understands humility isn't one in the same with meekness, and that hubris isn't to be confused with charisma.

As someone who is of the Reformed tradition...I believe we deliberate and discern in council. As a group we must seek to discern who is called to lead us. Individually, we must decide for ourselves what is our opinion vs what is our theological conviction and understanding of the problem. Having that nuanced wisdom helps us move forward together. How have you overcome challenges diplomatically in a leadership position? I have worked in higher education and churches my entire adult life. I can't say that all situations have been handled diplomatically, but overall I believe in collaborative and shared leadership. It requires compromise with appropriate levels of firmness to bring some along that may not be fully on board. I'm a believer in the 80/20 rule.

We must give each other space for grace and the ability to be heard in reasonable and meaningful ways. However, we still govern ourselves through councils. We continue to exercise grace with someone who disagrees with a decision, but we must move forward and not get stuck on trivial issues.

David Vaughn



“The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none; but knowledge comes easily to the discerning.” Pr. 14:6

This scripture came to me as I received this email and I think speaks for how I try to live my life. Throughout my life I have sought knowledge; know as much as I could hold. There is so much to see and learn about the world, about people, about life when we take time to listen. As a manager of Broadway theatres here in NYC, I have learned to work with many folks from all walks of life. Working with my staff, the acting company and technical crews, as well as the audience, gave me the opportunity daily to handle conflict and disagreements. Knowledge of my theatre, my staff, and the general rules of conduct allowed me to speak with confidence about what I know to be true. However, to be most productive I learned to listen to what the “other” has to say. There are always multiple ways to solve a problem and I have found they come from the most unlikely places. Wisdom comes from God and God lives in each individual. How can I serve God when I don’t see God in God’s Creation?

I think I would like to see these same qualities in our next Senior Minister. I think we would want a God centered leader with great preaching abilities. To be able to lead the congregation forward into this new world with boldness and strength of conviction, which come from Christ, leading us to action within the congregation, the community, and the world. Listening to the voice of others is an essential quality to be an effective leader. “No One is an Island; No One Walks Alone!”

After a good night’s rest and spending time in meditation, I find my mind is clearer more focused and I am able to be more certain in my decisions or indecisions. And so, I begin the next part of this discourse. This is the mechanism I find most effective in all areas of my life. It’s when I try to skip this process I get in trouble. With the most disagreeable customer, finding that moment to breathe and remember each person’s humanity allows for discussion. I think this approach is Christ like and I have found making space for the other always leads to a fuller understanding of what it means to live together as one family in Christ.

This is the basis of our faith. Being one in FAITH that GOD is the unifying factor of our being. We are one in UNITY with CHRIST. Thank you for this opportunity.

Andrea White



The Rev. Dr. Andrea C. White is Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. Her teaching and research centers on the creative entanglements of womanist theology, black critical theory, political theology, philosophy of religion and phenomenology. Dr. White has lectured and preached across the United States and her international lectureships have taken her to Brazil, Denmark, England, India, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden and Switzerland.

Dr. White has also served as Executive Director of the Society for the Study of Black Religion and Chair of the American Academy of Religion's unit in Black Theology. She is currently faculty chair of the Columbia University Senate's Commission on Diversity. She sits on editorial boards for several journals in the field of religion and advisory boards for several theological societies. She has worked on the advancement of human rights as a founding member of The Carter Center's Scholars in Action created to address gender violence against women and girls. Prior to her faculty appointment at Union, she served on the faculty at Candler School of Theology and in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. She has been awarded several research grants and is a recipient of Emory's Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Award. She holds a Ph.D. in theology from The University of Chicago, Master of Divinity from Yale Divinity School, and Bachelor of Arts from Oberlin College.

Dr. White has been an ordained American Baptist minister for twenty-three years having served as pastor of Aldrich Baptist Church in North Franklin, NY and chaplain for both Catskill Area Hospice and Springbrook, a residential school for persons with developmental disabilities in Oneonta, NY. She also served as Minister of Adult Christian Education at The University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel. She is a native New Yorker raised on Manhattan's Lower East Side and she is an active member of The Riverside Church. She and her husband, The Rev. Richard Landers, have two teenage daughters, Mara and Chloe.

Mark Yim



Mark Yim is 59 years old and has been a member of the Riverside Church since 2004. He works as a portfolio manager for GAMCO Investors in Rye, NY, focusing on Japan. Previously, he worked in similar capacities in Chicago and Tokyo. He has an AB from Princeton University and an MBA from the University of Chicago. Mark grew up in New Jersey and now lives in Upper Manhattan with his husband Peter and their daughter Emi. He loves reading, music, swimming, and thinking about the next family holiday.

I think I listen well. It surprises me, even to this day, that I can go into a professional interview (in this case, with a potential investee company) with a set of assumptions and have those same assumptions wilt before my very eyes. Often, I find something of greater value completely unrelated to what I was expecting. This requires critical and compassionate listening skills, and learning from mistakes, of which I have made plenty. I am reminded by what the late Rev. James E. Fitzgerald said, "Make sure your mind is open. But not so open that your brain falls out."

The qualities we should look for in a senior minister is intellectual heft. Patience in keeping to the historic mission of the Riverside Church. A deep compassion for our congregants, coupled with firmness in keeping the ship stable and afloat.

I try hard to remind myself when making decisions of the purpose of the decision. I listen thoughtfully and to everyone. I try to avoid jumping to conclusions, despite the temptation. Since 2012, I have been on the 7-member Board of our residential co-op, the past 5 years as President, and have learned that most decisions are clear, but for the 20% of cases where it is not, reframing the question often helps. For the rare 4 vs. 3 split decisions, disentangling the entire premise is a necessary exercise. This is where personal prayer can help. If the decision goes against me, then 'the market has spoken' and I will accept the decision.

In a leadership role, when I had problems with a fellow board member in my early days, I asked an old professor friend of mine what to do. She said, "Why not pick up the phone and invite them to tea?" It worked. We never see the full extent of what's going on in peoples' lives; remembering that people are, at bottom, people, helps. And a simple reaching out can go a long way.

When managing conflict, I believe it is the Christian way to see the presence of God in every person. There is also a greater body, which we compose. And there is a role each of us plays in making sure the body is healthy and thriving. If I must mete out 'judgment with gentleness', I will try to remind myself of the purpose - for the greater good of The Riverside Church. I pray that I, too, am receptive to being corrected in the right spirit.

Hylida Clarke

The qualities I possess that I feel would be most helpful to the SMSC are:

a good listener; careful with language; respectful to all
hard worker; good researcher
Thoughtfulness; humility; patience
non-judgmental; not intimidated

The qualities I would look for in a Senior Minister:

Scholarship in religion, history, social sciences; current on thinking and events of the time;
Accepting and knowledgeable of the various cultural theological perspectives;
Possessing a vision for the Church's future;
Interest in the thoughts, feelings and vision of church members;
Guidance and leadership in the decisions and actions of the Church;
Excellent skills in management, collaboration and negotiation;
A record of action in behalf of social justice;
Competence in engaging preaching (delivering the word) to a diverse congregation;
Promoter of spiritual growth and continuing education;
Compassionate concern/action for the earth and all of its inhabitants;
Action to lead, participate, and delegate with attention to follow-up;
Action to engage/ motivate the entire congregation in some level of activity in behalf of the church's agenda or program;
Collaborative, good listener, willing negotiator, thoughtful decision maker;
A good sense of humor, approachable, engaging with a joyful, upbeat personality and outlook on life;
Firm belief in equality and justice for all, including staff;
Engagement as much as possible in all of the Church's programs;

The mechanisms I have used to discern and accept decisions that were not aligned with my opinions are the following:

Clear and respectful statement and rationale for my position;
In the interest of clarity, asking questions and respectfully pursuing answers;

Periods of quiet reflection, meditation and sometimes a total emotional absence from the situation followed by intense focus or sometimes, merely a thought following which, after a brief time, amazingly, solutions have presented; in a sense, imposed;
Being project oriented (the work before us) as opposed to self and person oriented, I have committed to doing my part in bringing about project success.

In an atmosphere of fellowship and collaboration, when my decisions have been found to be impractical, not feasible, or not workable for good reasons, I have been able to rethink my decisions and adopt better decisions of others;
The ability to accept constructive criticism; (Rethinking some of my decisions have at times brought my ideas to group acceptance - humility);

In my leadership position, I have overcome challenges diplomatically by:

Asking questions and inviting discussion;
Being trustworthy, and straight forward
Being considerate and accepting of a range of presentational (gripping) styles; seeking consensus
Maintain impartiality, insist on transparency, respect confidentiality

Elizabeth “Beth” Wynne-St. Louis



I've been a member of Riverside since 1999. I first encountered Riverside Church during my Baccalaureate ceremony from the New School for Social Research. I received my Master's Degree in the beautiful, gothic Nave and felt so safe and comfortable. Dr. Forbes was the keynote speaker and I felt the love coming from the pulpit. After attending for two more years, I made the decision to join and I've never regretted it. While at Riverside, I've been involved in the Young Adult Ministry, Children and Families Ministry, the Education Commission, the Youth Ministry, and currently as a member of the Nominating Committee.

My professional career encompasses over 20 years in Human Resources, with a Master's in Clinical Psychology. Educationally, my goal had been to be a psychologist and therapist, but I soon discovered that I was a little too empathetic. When one of my clients in the non-profit organization I worked for disappeared, probably as the result of domestic violence, I had nightmares, both about her and her 4 young children. That made me realize that I needed to switch to HR.

Two of the skills critical to success, in any environment, include emotional intelligence (EQ) and conflict management. Both of these, at their core, hold relationships in high esteem. Understanding yourself and others, and being able to manage yourself are paramount to having high levels of EQ and to resolve conflicts. In HR, we're always attempting to make employment selections and decisions that are in the best interest of the company and the people. These relationships, when healthy, are a win-win for everyone. I have become quite skilled in these areas. Far from perfect, but definitely skilled!

Applying that same principle to the church, the relationship is between Christ and the people. Our goal should always be to exist and live in love, while doing the work of God, in the best interest of the people. It took me a long time to understand that conflict is a part of life, something not to avoid, but to dig deep into, and resolve, treating everyone with dignity and respect.

In my 20+ years at Riverside, I've seen my share of conflict. I admit I was disheartened and disappointed with the "drama" associated with Dr. Braxton, However, I was happy when the resulting conflict from his tenure and departure was met with prayer, understanding, teambuilding, and conflict resolution. The selection of our next senior minister must be accomplished with the wishes of the congregation at the forefront. Every member of the search committee must be willing to leave their agendas and pre-conceived notions at the door, and be willing to listen to different, and at times, conflicting perspectives and positions. I want to bring that to the committee. I want my participation to imbue the Senior Minister Search Committee with that same vigor and dedication to find a minister that will be able to guide us through this current conflict, and lead us to being the pinnacle and beacon of progressive Christianity that we are meant to be, focusing on the love and guidance of Christ.

THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK