



2020 Congregational Survey Results & Summary of Write-in Comments

The Riverside Church
2020 Congregational Survey

Background

The Congregational Survey is a way to hear from all who care about Riverside on a range of issues important to our life together as a faith community. The survey is one of several initiatives of the Riverside Development Committee to gather information to inform developing the options for building a church for the next 90 years. Answers will help plan how to best use our spiritual, financial, and real estate assets to advance our spiritual mission, commitment to justice, and service to our neighbors as well as long-term sustainability.

Survey Methodology

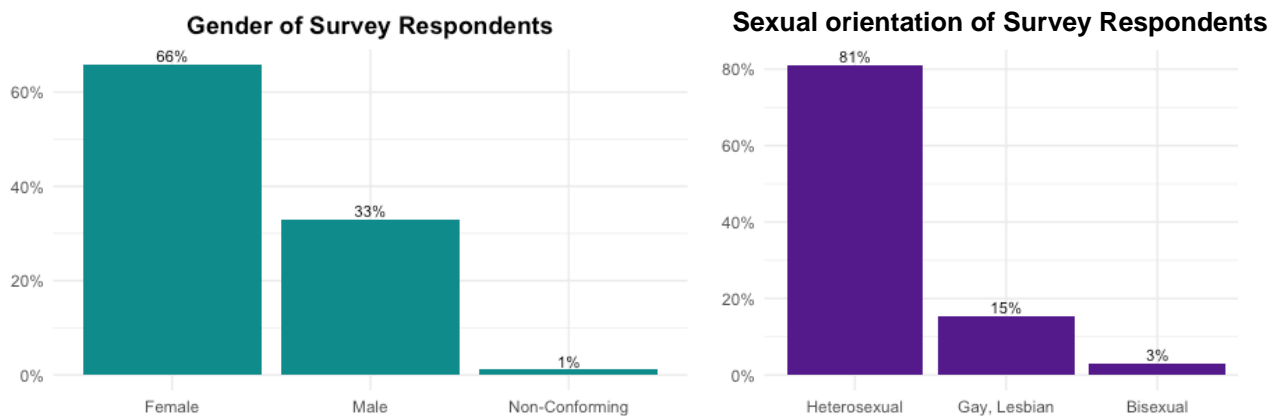
The Survey Committee developed the questionnaire informed by information they gathered from over 100 Riversiders on topic areas or questions they felt important to include. Congregational members and ‘all who care about Riverside’ were invited to complete the survey. A link to the online survey was published on The Riverside Church’s (TRC’s) website, social media pages, shared in emails, and referenced during services and coffee hour. Paper surveys were mailed to 1,400 members of the Congregation and were available for pick up at the food pantry.

A total of 508 surveys were completed between October and December 2020. The number of cases varies somewhat since respondents could chose not to answer any question. Percentages in this report are based on the number who answered the question

Profile of Riverside Survey Participants

While not including everyone, survey participants provide a snapshot of ‘who we are’ as church and faith community.

Gender and Sexual Orientation. About two-thirds of respondents, 66%, are women and the remaining third, men. Just under one percent of respondents identified as gender non-conforming or “other.”¹ About 81% of respondents identified as heterosexual and 18% as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.²

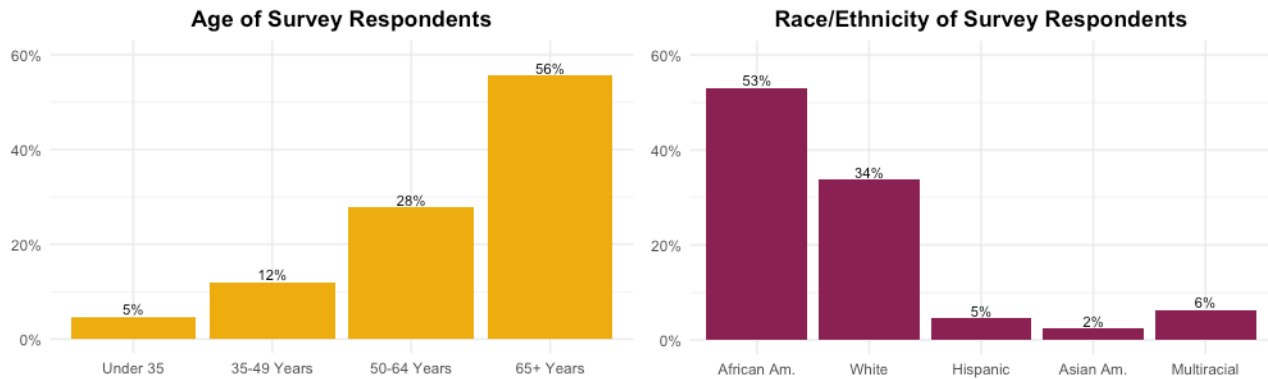


¹ N=430

² N=424

Age. Respondents are generally older; over half are 65 years old or older.³ The age distribution of survey participants reflects the age distribution of congregation. Based on available information, in Church records, as of 2021, 51% of Congregation members are age 65 or older and 7% under 35 years old.

Race/Ethnicity. A majority identified as either African American/Black (53%) or Non-Hispanic White (34%).⁴ The percentage of respondents identifying as Hispanic was 5%, with 2% Asian/ Asian American, and 6% describing themselves as multi-racial.



Education and Income. Riversiders tend to be highly educated – more than half of survey participants report a graduate or professional degree. Incomes are relatively high. The majority reported a household income above the median income for New York City, which was \$63,800 in 2020, and near or above the median household income for the U.S., which was \$78,500, according to the census.

Education Level

Less than high school	>1%
High school or equivalent	6%
College graduate	20%
Graduate/ professional degree	56%
Not reported	18%

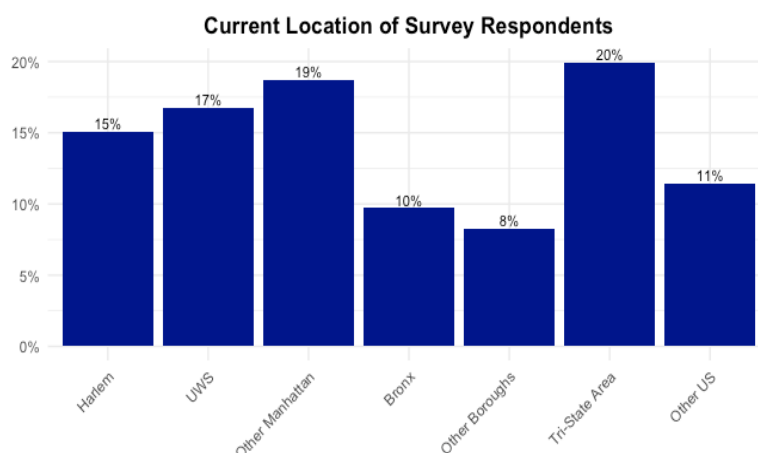
Household Income

Under \$25,000	5%
\$25,000 - 49,999	10%
\$50,000 - 74,999	12%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	13%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	17%
\$150,000 or more	21%
Not reported	22%

³ N=431

⁴ N=418

Residential Neighborhood. About one-third of respondents live in Harlem (15%) or the Upper West Side (17%). More than one-half live in Manhattan. Another 18% live elsewhere in New York City, primarily in Bronx. One in five live outside of New York City, in the New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut) and 11% live elsewhere in the U.S.



Religious Background. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents reported that they were raised in a specific denomination or religious tradition. Respondents reported numerous religious backgrounds; only Baptist, Catholic, and Methodist backgrounds were mentioned by 10% or more of respondents.

Current Denominational Affiliation. When asked about whether they currently identified with a specific denomination or religious tradition, half (49%) of respondents who answered the question answered “none.” Thus, about half of those who were raised in a denomination no longer identify with any denomination or religious tradition. Surveys of the general American population also show an increase in individuals who do not identify with a religious denomination although substantial numbers report that nonetheless, religion or spirituality is important to them.

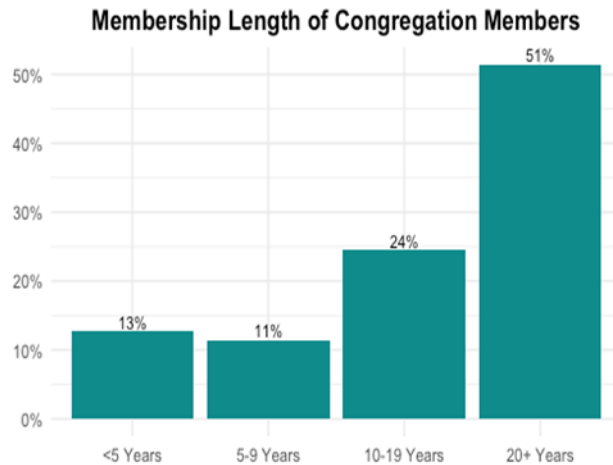
Previous Religious Background		Current Denomination	
Baptist	25%	Baptist	15%
Catholic	14%	Catholic	2%
Methodist	12%	Methodist	4%
Episcopalian	8%	Episcopalian	2%
Presbyterian	7%	Presbyterian	4%
Christian	6%	Christian	3%
United Church of Christ	4%	United Church of Christ	10%
Historical Black Denomination ¹	5%	Historical Black Denomination ¹	<1%
Non/ Interdenominational ²	4%	Non/ Interdenominational ²	8%
Other	12%	Other	1%
None	2%	None	45%

¹ AME, AME Zion, CME, COGI, National Baptist Convention, etc.

² Describes a religion/ spiritual tradition but not a specific denomination –e.g., Ecumenical, Progressive Christianity etc.

Church Participation

Membership status. The majority of survey respondents, about 87%, are members of the Riverside congregation, while 13% did not identify as members.⁵ More than half of the members have been members of The Riverside Church for more than 20 years; 13% have been members for five years or less.



Non-member Riversiders. The table below shows how the 60 survey respondents who are non-members describe their relationship with Riverside. Among the 19% who responded ‘other,’ several described themselves as former members, or as living outside of New York, or visiting or occasionally participating online. Almost half of non-members have been coming to Riverside for fewer than five years; however 32% have been involved for 20 years or longer. About 40% of the non-members can be considered *active non-members*, meaning they attend worship or regularly participate in other Riverside activities and give financially to the church.

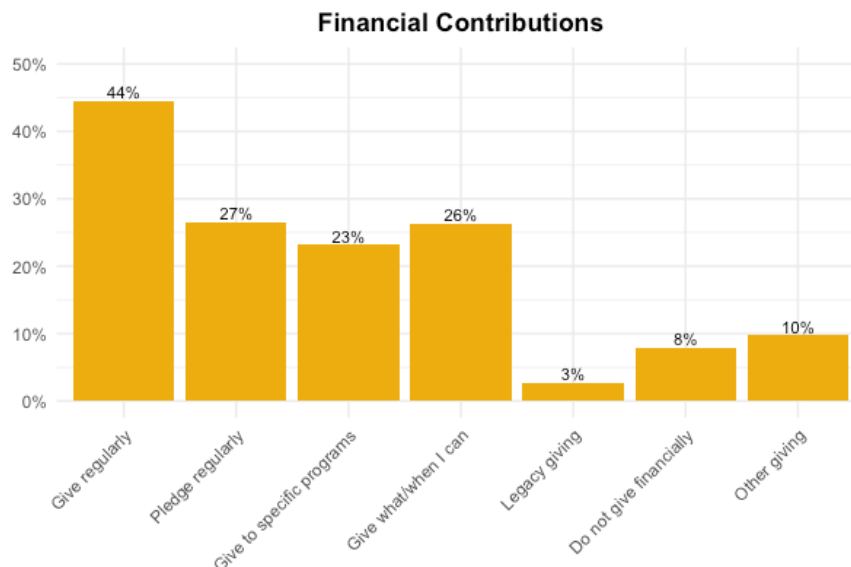
Non-Member Relationship with Riverside Church

Attend services regularly but not a member	32%
Participate in programs regularly but not a member	18%
First time or occasional visitor	13%
Former member	10%
Staff member	7%
Parent of child in Weekday School or Hawks Program	2%
Other	19%

⁵N=463

Lay leadership. The questionnaire asked respondents, **Have you held a position on any commission, ministry, committee, or other group at Riverside?** Just over half (54%) are currently serving, or have served, in a church leadership position.⁶ Of the 46% who have never held a position and replied to the follow up question, **Would you be interested in a position on any commission, ministry, committee or other group at Riverside?** one in five (19%) are interested in serving in the future. This proportion is lower than reported in the prior (2012) survey but may reflect the greater numbers who participate in church life only remotely.

Financial Giving. Of those who responded to the question on financial giving -- **Do you or your family/ household contribute financially to the Church?** -- the most numerous response was that individuals gave regularly, indicated by 44%, although most others support the church financially in some way.⁷ Eight percent do not give at all financially to The Riverside Church. Considering only survey respondents who are members, only a slightly higher proportion (46% of members compared with 44% overall) give regularly. A question for future consideration is reasons why the majority of Riversiders do not give regularly.



Worship attendance before COVID-19 restrictions and after COVID-19 restrictions limiting in-person gathering was assessed with the following question: **Since last January, about how often have you attended Riverside Church for worship services?** *Please include Sunday Worship and any other worship services such as Space for Grace or Morning Light that you have attended in person or participated online?*

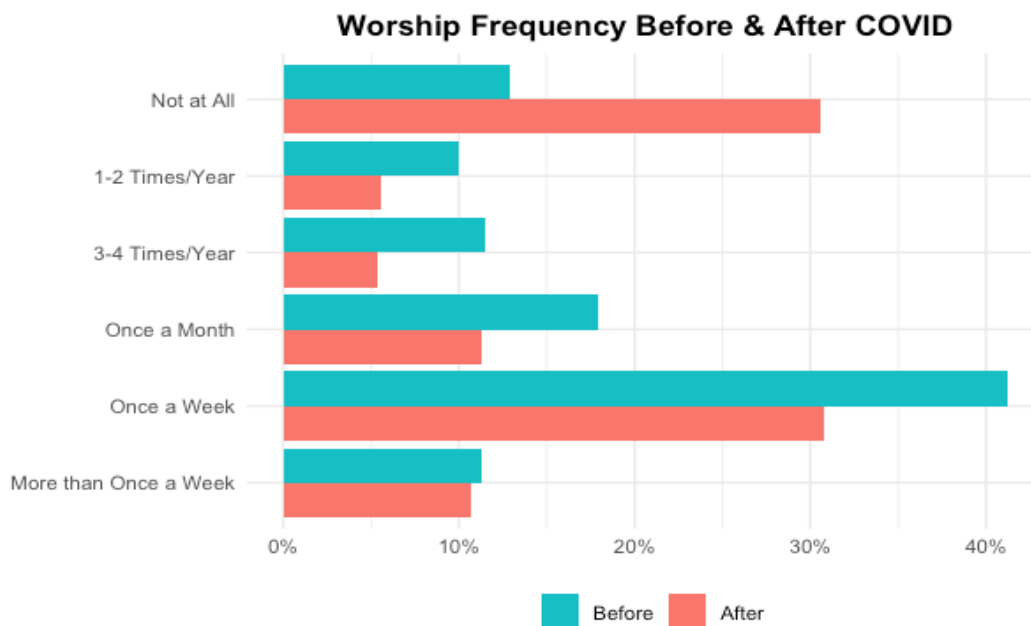
When comparing worship service attendance before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, participation in all categories declined.⁸ Further analysis shows that the greatest decline in attendance at worship is overwhelmingly among those who were not attending regularly prior to pandemic restrictions. Most Individuals, about 60%, who previously attended worship weekly or more often maintained their more regular attendance.

⁶ N=443

⁷ N= 452

⁸ N=452

Attendance Frequency	Before COVID-19	After COVID-19
1. Not at all	13%	31%
2. Once or twice a year	10%	6%
3. Three or four times during the year	12%	5%
4. About once a month	18%	11%
5. About once a week	41%	31%
6. More than once a week	11%	11%

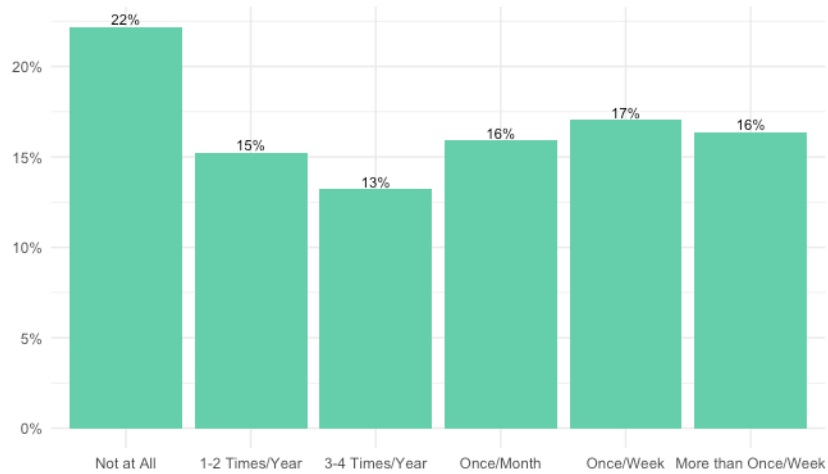


Non-Worship activities. The frequency of current participation in non-worship Riverside Church activities, elicited by the following question, varied. **How often do you participate in any other Riverside activities? For example, music, social justice action, faith formation, parish care, children/youth, or social service programs or events. Please include participating virtually or online.**

About half (49%) of all survey respondents participate in some non-worship activity monthly or more often. This includes meetings of commissions, committees, Church Council, or other lay leadership activities; volunteering for food pantry, flowers or other programs. More than one-third participate in some non-worship activity weekly or more often.⁹

⁹ N=446

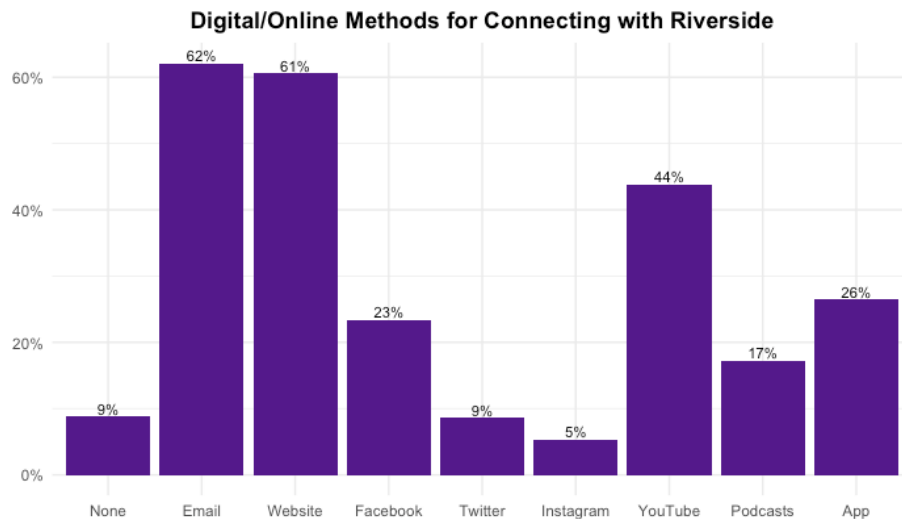
**Current Participation in Any Church Activity Other than Worship
Members and Non-Members**



Digital/ online connection

Among respondents who connect with The Riverside Church online, the methods most often used are email and the website.¹⁰ The highest reported use of the website was for accessing Worship and the 'Virtual' Coffee Hour. Write-in comments on the questionnaire often refer to positive experiences and desire to continue Virtual Coffee Hour.

Which if any of the following ways do you connect with Riverside online?



¹⁰ N=455

Size of the words in the “word cloud” image above indicates how often the word or phrase is written in response to the question

What Brought You to and Keeps You at Riverside?

A separate question asked **Thinking about what originally brought you to The Riverside Church and what keeps you here, please select from the list below the reasons that best match your reasons for coming and staying at this church. You may select more than one.**

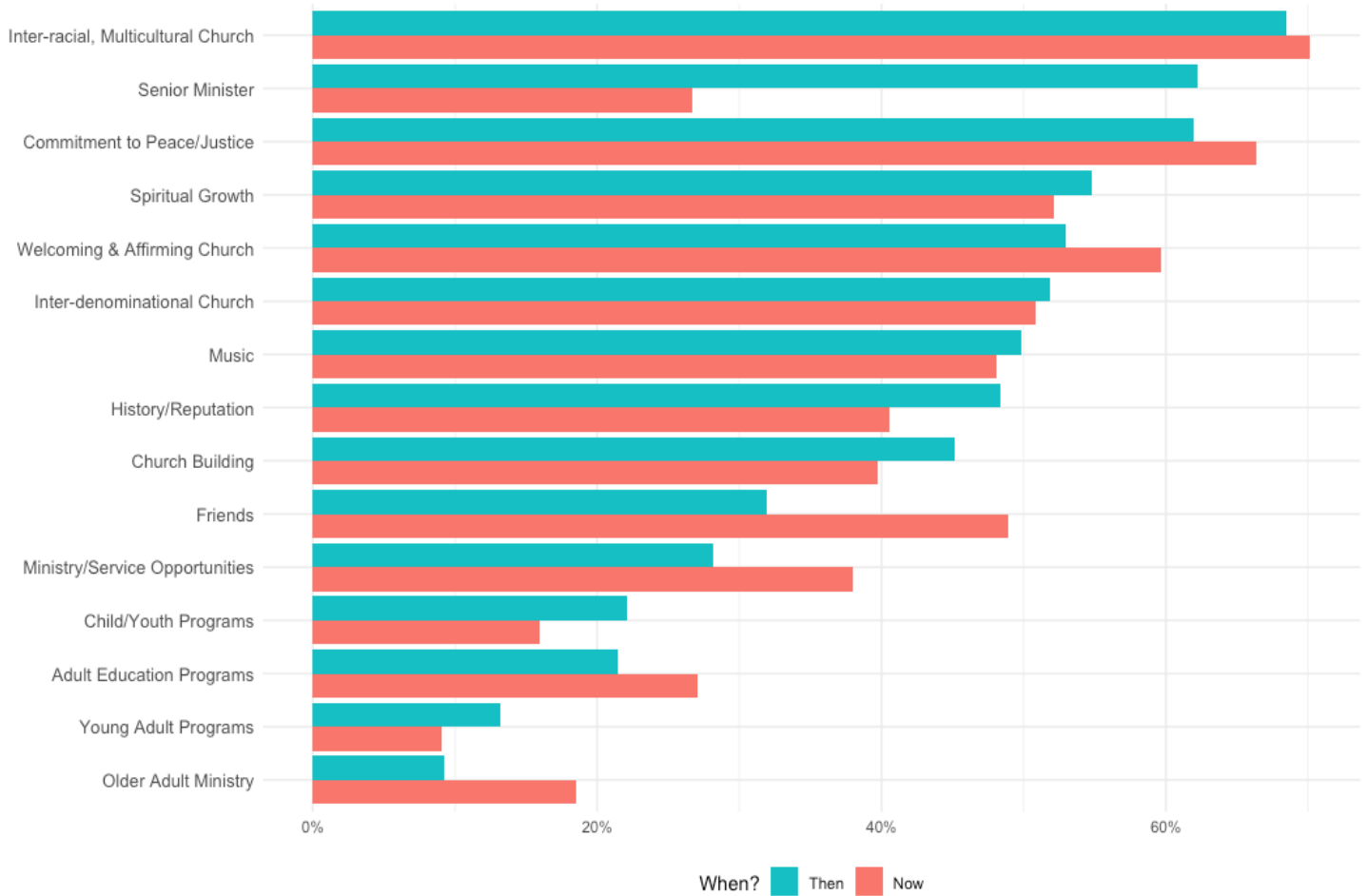
The Riverside Church's identity as an interracial, multi-cultural church was the foremost reason that originally attracted respondents, closely followed by the person who was Senior Minister when they first came to Riverside and Riverside's commitment to peace and justice.

Today, the top three reasons respondents continue to come to The Riverside Church are its interracial, multi-cultural character (70%), its commitment to peace and justice (66%), and its being a welcoming and affirming church.

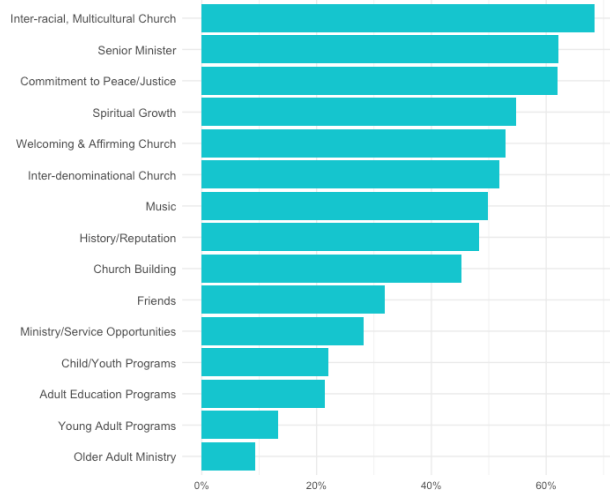
Nearly half of respondents (49%) cited friends, relationships with members as their reason for remaining a part of Riverside. By contrast, just under one-third of respondents (32%) said that was their original attraction to Riverside. That 17-percentage-point increase is the largest change from reason for initial coming to reason for remaining a part of Riverside.

Attraction to The Riverside Church	What Originally Attracted you to Riverside	What are reasons you remain a part of Riverside
Interracial, multi-cultural church	68%	70%
The Senior Minister	62%	27%
The commitment to peace and justice	62%	66%
Opportunity for spiritual growth	55%	52%
Welcoming and affirming church	53%	60%
Inter-denominational church	52%	51%
The music at services	50%	48%
History of Riverside, its reputation	48%	41%
The inspirational church building	45%	40%
Friends, relationships with members	32%	49%
Opportunities for ministry or service	28%	38%
Children/ youth programs	22%	16%
Adult education programs	21%	27%
Young adult programs	13%	9%
Older adult ministry programs	9%	18%
Some other reasons	11%	7%

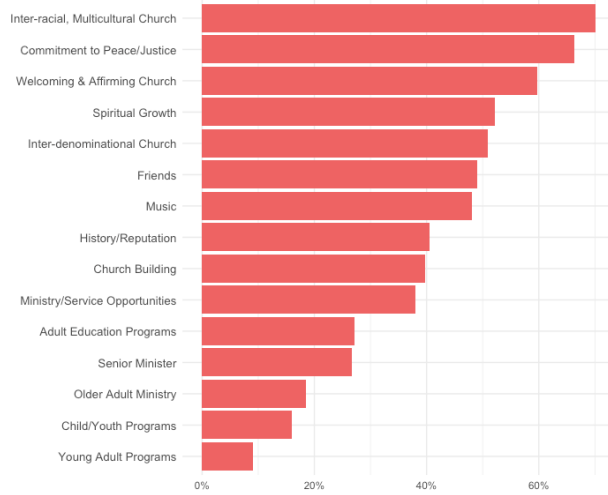
What Brought You To Riverside?



What Brought You To Riverside Initially?



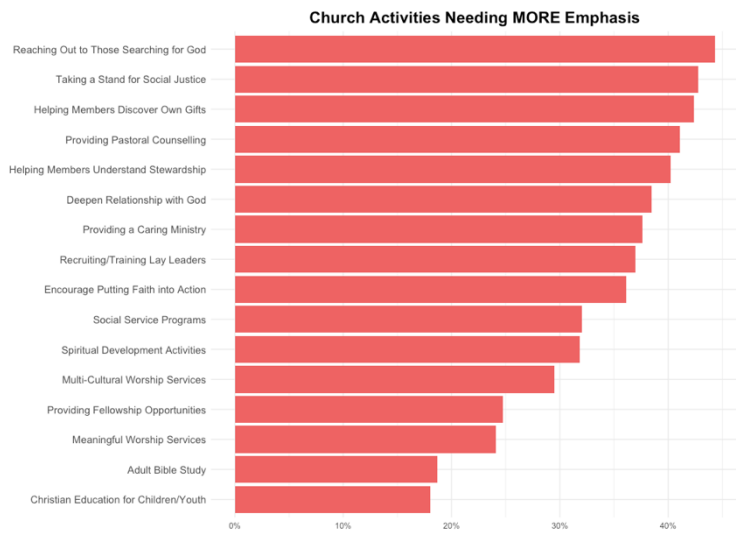
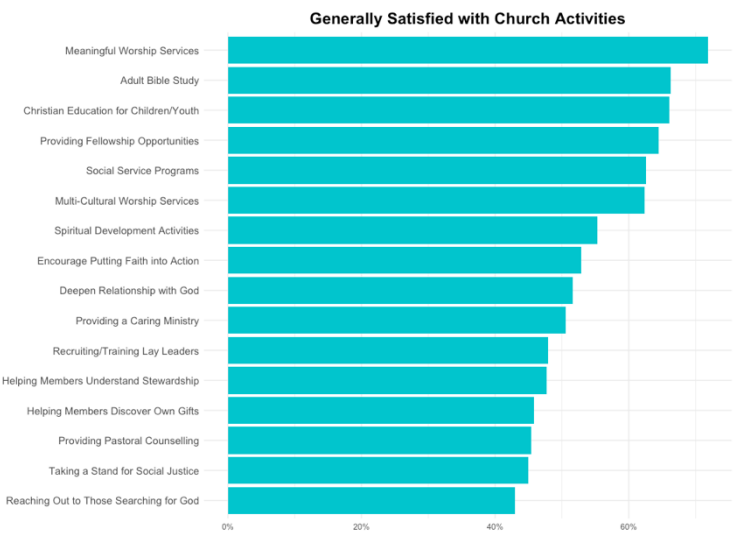
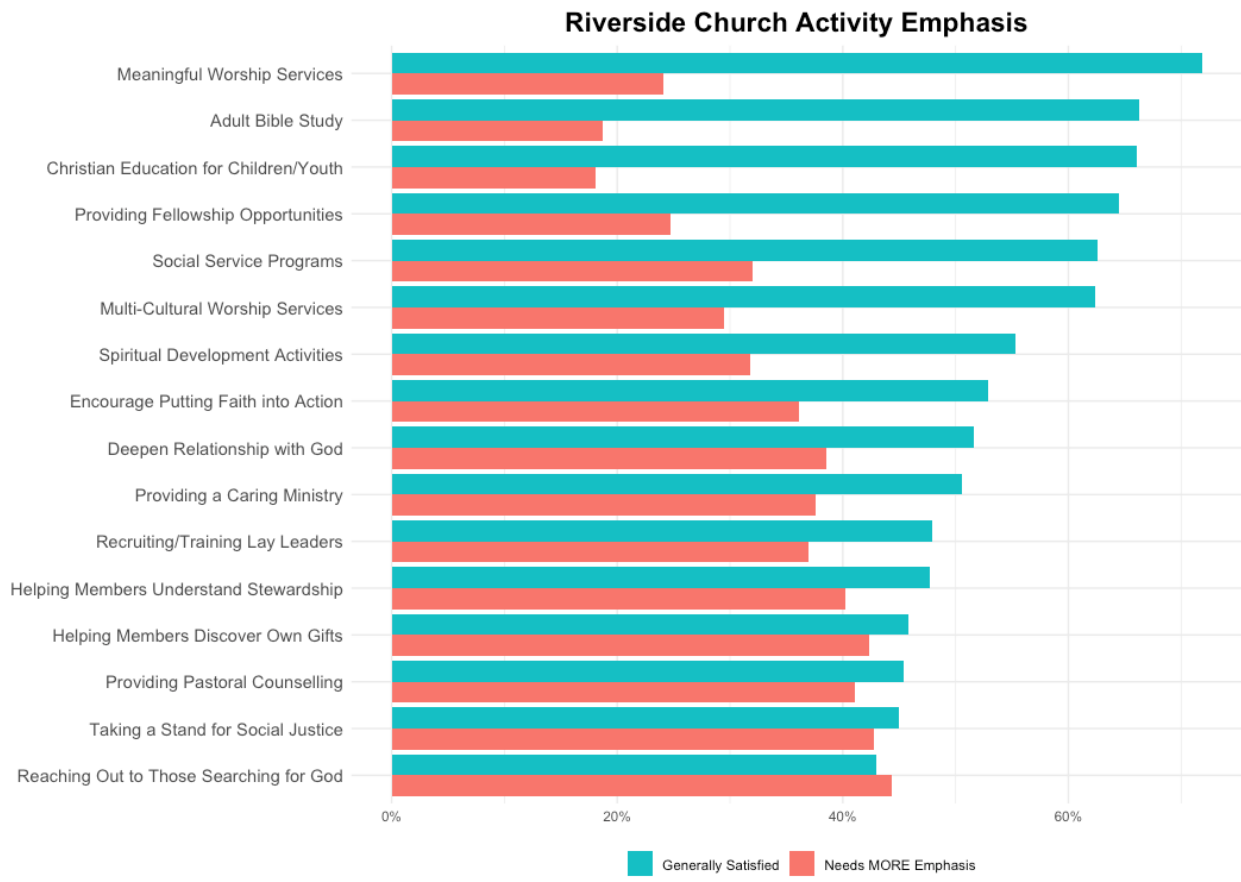
What Keeps You at Riverside Now?



Satisfaction with The Riverside Church Activities

Riversiders were asked to rate a list of activities that many churches perform, indicating whether they personally feel that Riverside Church needs to give it **MORE emphasis**, they are **GENERALLY SATISFIED** with the Church's current performance in this area, or the activity currently receives **TOO MUCH emphasis**. Few respondents thought any activities received too much emphasis. The activities most often rated as needing more emphasis included 1) Reaching out to those searching for God; 2) Helping members discover their gifts for ministry and service; 3) Providing pastoral counseling for members; 4) Taking a stand and acting on social justice issues as a congregation; 5) Helping members understand use of money, time, talents as Christian stewardship.

Riverside Church Activity	Needs More Emphasis	Generally Satisfied
1. Reaching out to those searching for God or looking for a church home	50%	49%
2. Helping members discover their own gifts for ministry and service	48%	52%
3. Providing pastoral counseling for members	47%	52%
4. Taking a stand and acting on social justice issues <u>as a congregation</u>	45%	48%
5. Helping members understand use of money, time and talents as Christian stewardship	45%	53%
6. Recruiting and training lay leaders	43%	55%
7. Helping individuals deepen their personal, spiritual relationship with God	42%	57%
8. Providing a caring ministry for the sick, shut-ins and the bereaved	42%	57%
9. Encouraging individuals to put their faith into action regarding social justice issues	39%	56%
10. Spiritual development activities such as guided retreats, house churches, laity empowerment workshops	36%	62%
11. Social service programs to help the poor and needy such as the food pantry, clothing service, shower project	34%	65%
12. Multi-cultural worship services that reflect the diversity of our congregation	31%	65%
13. Providing fellowship opportunities for people of faith to come together	27%	72%
14. Worship services that provide a meaningful experience to individuals	25%	74%
15. Christian education for children and youth	21%	78%
16. Adult Bible Study that addresses both social and personal concerns	21%	76%
17. Other	54%	35%



Possibilities for Riverside Next 90 Sustainability Development

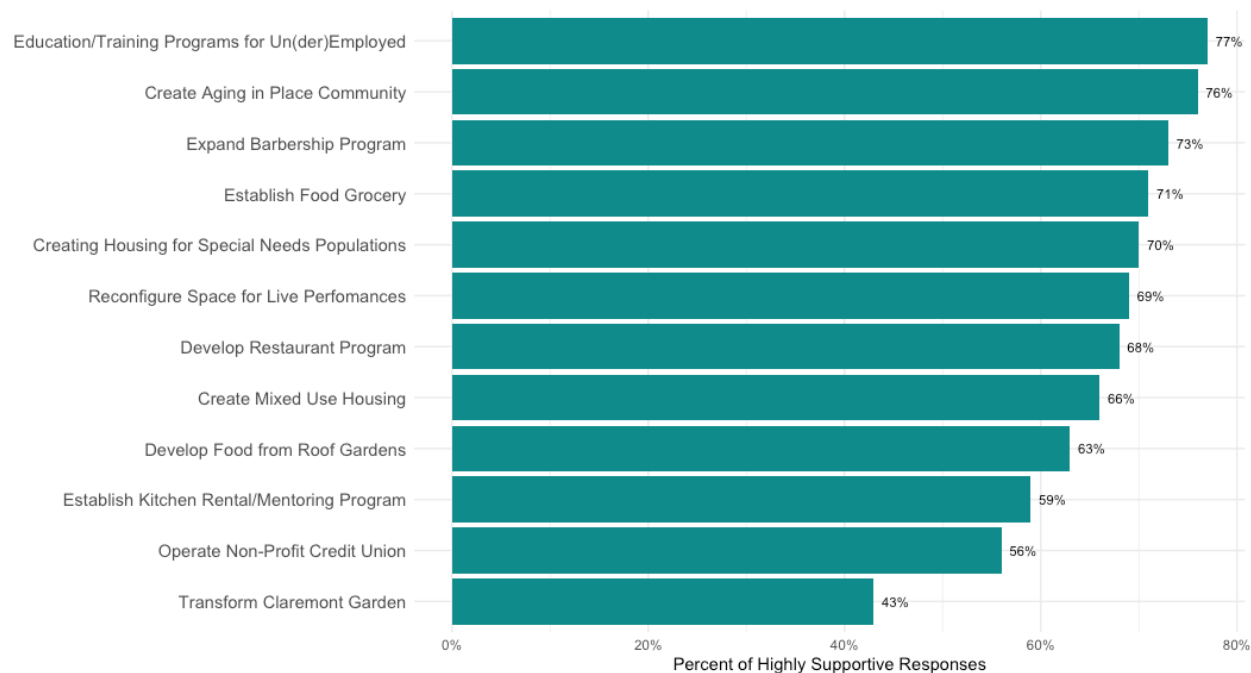
Our vision and plans for the future of The Riverside Church must concern sustainability while fulfilling missional goals of the Church or its commissions or programs. Following are some suggestions offered by members of the congregation. Strong support for an initiative indicates that the respondent gave the suggestion a rating of 80% or higher on the rating scale.

Respondents were most strongly supportive of providing training and certification programs for the unemployed and underemployed, closely followed by creating an aging-in-place community for older adults. Low-income Individuals and families, including those leaving homelessness; youth leaving foster care; and formerly incarcerated people, would be welcome to housing Riverside might create, respondents said.

Next 90 Possibilities	% Who Strongly Support
<u>Food Justice</u>	
1. Establish a Food Justice Grocery providing low-cost groceries, fresh produce, and prepared meals, to the general public and as well as free food to people who are currently recipients of food through the pantry.	71%
2. Support immigrant and local street food businesses by establishing a kitchen rental and mentoring program, for example, partnering with the Street Vendor Project of the Urban Justice Center.	59%
3. Develop 'food from the roof' roof gardens with greenhouses and a hydroponic system to grow vegetables and herbs for our grocery/food pantry and to sell to local restaurants.	63%
<u>Economic Justice</u>	
4. Provide education and training and certification programs for unemployed and underemployed persons, such as IT technology (e.g. coding, programming) and green energy skills (e.g. solar panel installation), including a program to help graduates with their transition to employment.	77%
5. Expand the current barbershop program into a full service barbershop with a training program leading to certification, and providing free or low-cost services to the community.	73%
6. Develop a culinary arts, restaurant service, and management program with a quality restaurant that would provide mentored work experience and help trainees with transition to employment.	68%
7. Operate a non-profit credit union providing cash checking, affordable small-dollar loans, and credit-building loan products as an alternative to commercial high-interest payday loan businesses.	56%
<u>Housing Justice</u>	
8. Create an aging in place community for older adults who want to remain in their homes but need support such as transportation assistance, light housekeeping, shopping and cooking, daily check-ins for physical security, on-site nurses in case of emergencies.	76%
9. Create mixed use building(s) that would include some market rate rentals that would help sustain lower-rent, affordable units.	66%
10. Using city, state, or federal housing assistance programs, creating housing for special needs populations.	70%

Next 90 Possibilities	% Who Strongly Support
Hospitality and Culture	
11. Change the message of Riverside's buildings to one of outward-reaching welcome by transforming the Claremont garden (Garth) into a spiritual pocket park open to the public with the labyrinth inlaid on the surface and the main Claremont entrance through a bank of glass doors on the back wall.	43%
12. Reconfigure existing spaces for live performances with capability for internet broadcast with diverse programming including Jazz at Riverside, Gospel, R&B, Latin Music, and Young Performers series.	69%

Percent Who Strongly Support Next 90 Possibilities



Other Priorities for Riverside Programs and Initiatives

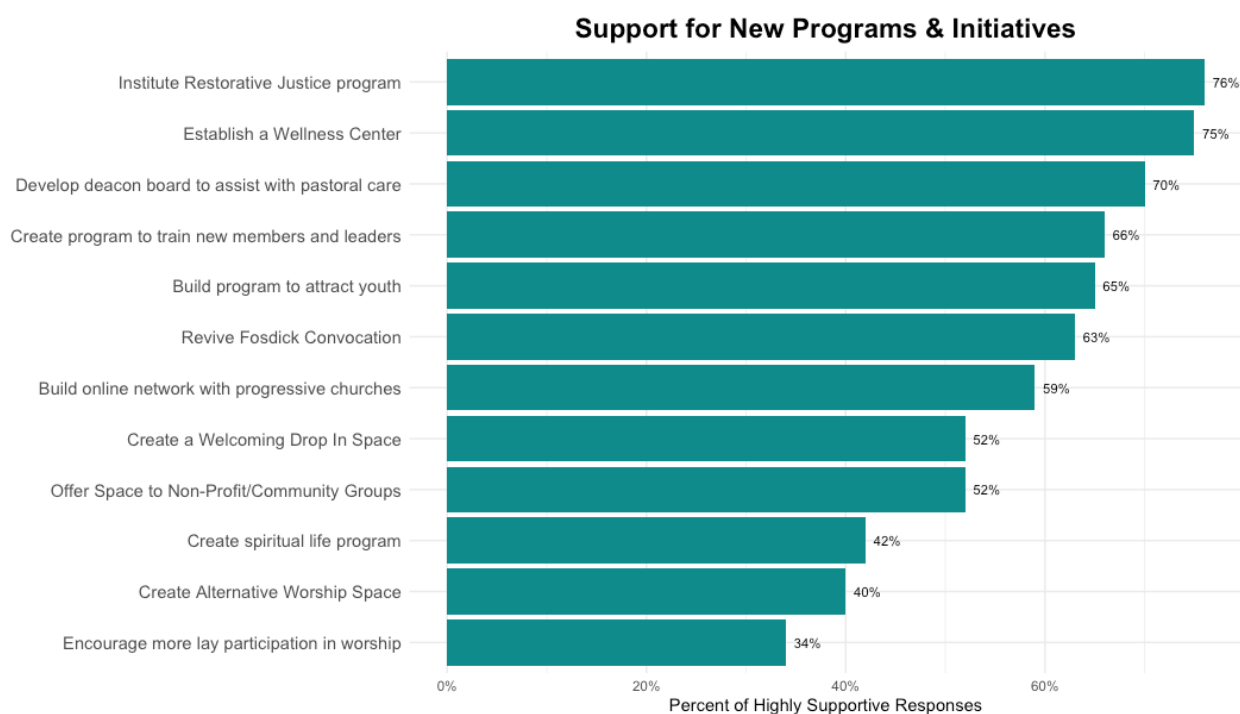
Another set of questions asked respondents to rate their priorities for **other options for programs and initiatives in different areas of our congregational life**. High priority or strong support indicates that the respondent gave the suggestion a rating of 80% or higher on the rating scale.

The highest priorities for Riverside Church programs and initiatives were to design and institute a program modeled after the Restorative Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and to establish a Wellness Center.

	Program or Initiative	% Who Strongly Support
1	Design and institute a program modeled after Restorative Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions that seeks to overcome racism and misogyny with justice, promote healing and teach peacemaking.	76%
2	Establish a Wellness Center including a pastoral counseling center for emotional and spiritual healing.	75%
3	Develop a trained deacon board to assist the clergy in the pastoral care of serving communion and taking it to shut-ins, regularly visiting the sick and disabled members of the congregation, accompanying members during times of crisis and transition, administering the benevolences of the church to those in need.	70%
4	Build a program to attract young people to Riverside's national/international youth ministry, provide them with a hostel while they are here and follow them home with an alumni program.	66%
5	Create a program to train new members and elected leaders in Riverside's polity, worship, and mission and help place volunteers in a ministry or program that will use their talents.	66%
6	Revive the Fosdick Convocation, a large meeting of theologians and lay people from around the country and the world, to explore new understandings of progressive Christianity and refresh their ministries through a variety of workshops and worship services.	63%
7	Build an online network of partnerships with progressive churches across the country and the world so that each church can hear the preaching and the music of the others and enter in to the diversity of the Christian faith without leaving home.	59%
8	Create a welcoming drop in space – a lounge, comfortable place to relax, meet with friends after service or an event for both congregational and community members.	52%
9	Offer free or affordable space for non-profit, service, advocacy, community groups to use for gatherings/ programs.	52%
10	Create a program for persons wishing a more disciplined and committed spiritual life such as following a "rule of life" that involves a specific routine of study, work and prayer, regular retreats into silence, and meeting regularly with a spiritual director.	42%

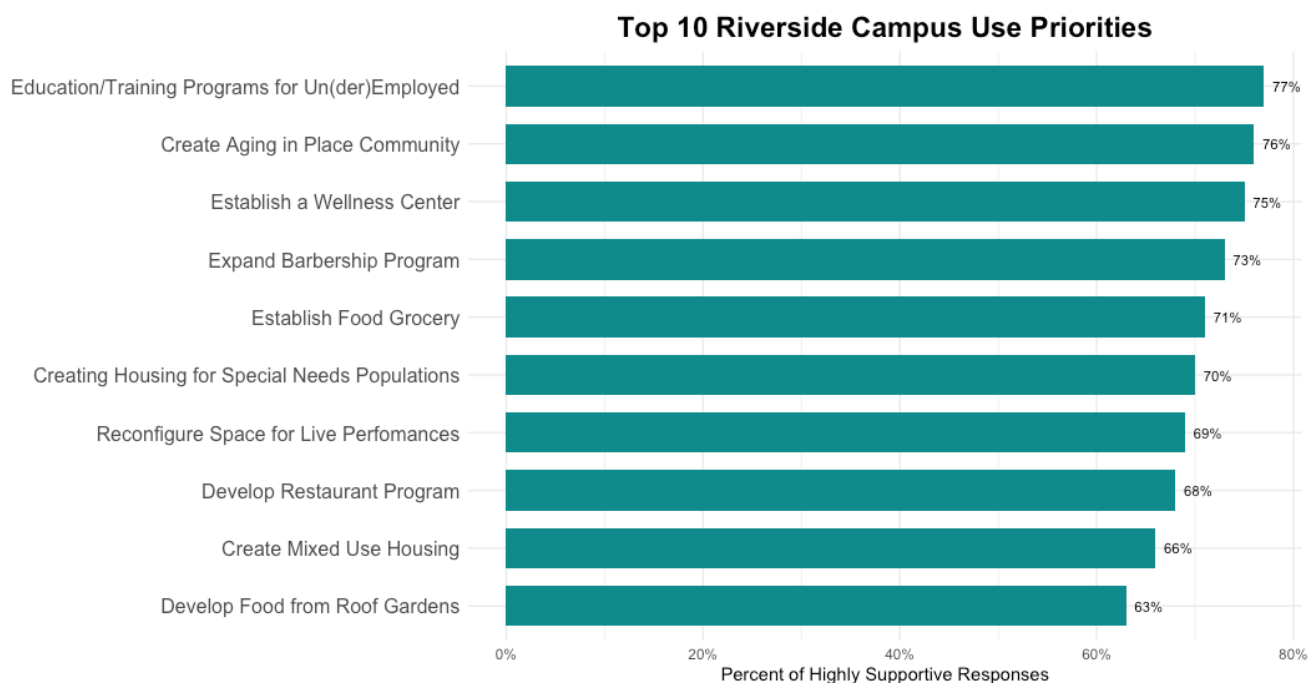
Program or Initiative

11	Create a space for alternative worship services such as jazz vespers, liturgical dance, rap liturgies, devotional chanting and contemporary hymns.	40%
12	Encourage more lay participation in worship services – such as making the call for offering a time for lay testimonials, teaching the congregation hymns in other languages and from other cultures.	34%



Possibilities for Riverside Campus Use – Either Next 90 or Other Initiatives

The survey assessed the congregation's and community's priorities for campus use in both the "Next 90" and "Other Priorities and Initiatives" sections of the survey. This graph below presents top 10 space use priorities from any section of the questionnaire.



Additional written-in comments, descriptions, suggestions, and answers

In addition to the checklist and rating type questions, the questionnaire provided space for survey participants to provide additional comments or suggestions for each of the survey topics. Close to 300 individuals wrote in additional information that has been coded and summarized in narrative form. The following pages include some examples of write-in, narrative descriptions of views and experiences.

In the past year, when have you felt most connected to the ministries at Riverside? What groups, initiatives, programs most shaped and invigorated your faith?

More than half (286) of all survey respondents wrote an answer to this question. The most common answer (43%) described participating in worship, most often Sunday service, but Space for Grace/ Grace Notes, and Morning Light were also mentioned, as well as appreciation for music at services.

The online worship services have been very helpful and inspiring. The preaching/sermons have been thought provoking and inspiring and the music has been exceptional.

I am a dedicated member of the Morning Prayer family... I attend Grace Notes, and Morning Light when I can. All of these, particularly MP, have invigorated my faith.

These virtual services have really lifted me through this time. They give me something to look forward to and something new to consider throughout the week. Church has more meaning now without the church building itself.

More than 80% of persons answering described participating in an activity, initiative, or event of one or more of Riverside's commissions. One third (32%) of respondents referred to Education Commission / Faith Formation activities such as Adult Bible Study or special programs for youth or families.

Riverside Book Club, Open Bible Study, Adult Education Committee, Education Commission, many (many!) Education small study groups AND church-wide Education programs. Also, Spiritual Retreats throughout each year.

The Bonhoeffer Symposium. I found it highly informative and it generally provided an opportunity for exploring existential questions around making difficult, moral choices within a Christ centered scriptural context.

Twenty-eight percent (28%) described Mission and Social Justice advocacy and and/or specific events such as the Race to Action series.

From the beginning of my relationship with Riverside, I have found strong connection--spiritually and in activism--to the small discussion groups that meet on Sunday mornings and sub-committees of the Mission and Social Justice Commission such as the Poor Peoples' Campaign, Lift Every Voice and Vote, and the work of the Antiracism Taskforce.

Participating in Parish Care initiatives or Social Services initiatives, or appreciation for Parish Care outreach, was described by one in five (19%) individuals describing their past year experiences.

Parish care is my connection to the church and where I feel most invigorated in my faith walk in 2020

Feeling very separated since Covid. Feeling distant and removed until I received a lovely note from [member of Parish Care] ... I leave it with my mail and frequently reread it and it has helped me feel still attached to Riverside ministry and community. Thank you for that.

Support Needed during COVID-19 Pandemic

Respondents were asked how Riverside, as a faith community, could support congregants during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic: **The Covid19 pandemic has changed nearly every American's way of life. If you wish to, please share your thoughts about how Riverside as a faith community might support congregants during these challenging times?**

The following three themes arose from their responses.

- **Online Ministry:** Respondents have appreciated the digital ministry and want it expanded to equal status with the live ministries.
- **Pastoral Care:** Respondents need more pastoral care to help them through the pandemic, particularly the reinstatement of the Wellness and the Pastoral Counselling Centers.
- **Social Services/ Advocacy/ Action:** Respondents reaffirmed the social justice mission of helping others through the pandemic, particularly expanding food and housing assistance.

These quotes convey the general tone of the responses:

Continue to work with your members on ways to evolve at Riverside yet taking note of the wonderful traditions that make Riverside "Riverside." Finding a bipartisan way to move forward as a church and acknowledge and maintain some of the bedrock that help make Riverside the church she is today. You don't have completely to get rid of or "delete" a program that has worked in the past and brought people to the church in order to have a new idea and want to do something new. There is room at the table.

Doing great work! Don't over complicate things or make the experience overwhelming. Make sure the simply, true and perfect message of God's love and peace transcends all of this and gets through to every individual person who comes through the door or streams from their home.

It is important to continue food pantry, support for homeless/showers and provide group grief therapy for those who have lost friends and loved ones. Be an advocate for distributing the vaccine to delivery drivers, grocery workers, restaurant servers. They are essential workers.

Appendix - Narrative Summary of Survey Results

What follows is a narrative summary of select findings from the Riverside Congregational Survey written by Rev. Liz Wheeler, member of the Congregational Survey Committee and member of prior Senior Minister Search Committee.

RIVERSIDE 2020 CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Commentary by Rev. Elizabeth Wheeler on Survey Results

In 2019 the Church Council, authorized a congregational survey. The survey would be part of the church-wide reflection and planning for the future. Its purpose was:

- To articulate who Riverside is, what Riverside's mission is, how this mission responds to Christ's call and meets the needs of God's creation;
- To provide Riverside lay and clergy with the data to help them set their priorities and evaluate their work for the optimum use of their resources;
- To assist the Senior Minister Search Committee identify the leadership skills and qualities that are the best match for this congregation as it begins the next 90 years;
- To hear from all who care about Riverside —members and nonmembers —who want to help shape a new church for a new world.

A Congregational Survey Committee of volunteers was led by Angela Aidala, research faculty at Columbia University, and included Rev. Elizabeth Wheeler, Brad Jones, Pat Pell, Marie Wilson, Rev. Josephine Cameron and David Jenson. Original committee members were joined by Allen Kratz and Rev. Geraldine Howard, members of the Church Council, for analysis and preparing reports of survey results. To develop survey topics and questions the survey team met with the Church Council, the Commissions and committees and with friends and members of Riverside after service and at open hearings. We also consulted other surveys: The *Community Needs Assessment* of the Morningside Heights Community Coalition, the Riverside Development Committee's *Community Assessment and Partnership Study*, the Pew Research Center's studies on the changing religious landscape in America. The data and analysis of these studies provided the context for developing our survey and the nuance for our questions, and helped with interpretation of results.

WHO WE ARE

We received 508 responses to the Congregational survey, 370 online and 138 on paper.

- The majority, 53%, identify as African American/Black and 34% non-Hispanic/White;
- Over half were age 65 or older; only 7% were 35 or less;
- Over 70% lived in New York City, 32% of these in Harlem and the Upper West Side;
- Half report household incomes over \$75,000 annually and two-thirds have college or advanced degrees;
- 75% have been members of Riverside for ten years or more.

These numbers do not surprise but the change in religious affiliation of Riverside members is new. It is important to remember that how we do things at Riverside —our culture — reflects where we come from and the traditions we come with. There will be continuity and change depending upon which traditions are dominant and which receding.

For instance, the United Church of Christ understanding of autonomy and polity is not the same as the Baptist understanding of autonomy and polity. The African American heritage of gospels and spirituals brings to worship a different experience from the Anglo-American repertoire of classical music. When, therefore, we examine the changing proportions of denominational affiliation (or lack of it) within the congregation, we must keep in mind the effects of these changes will have on how we do things here and how we stay together.

In response to questions that asked in what denomination they were raised, and with what if any denomination do they currently identify. Some changes from previously to now:

- 25% of Riverside's members were raised as Baptist; today 15% identify as Baptist.
- 14% of Riversiders were raised as Roman Catholic; today 2% identify as Catholic.
- 12% were raised as Methodist; today 4% identify as Methodist.
- But while only 4% were raised as United Church of Christ; today 10% identify as UCC.
- And most significantly, only 2% said they grew up with "no affiliation" or said "none;" today 45% answered they do not currently identify with a specific denomination or religious tradition! They are called "Nones."

The implications of these changes are several. Earlier, Baptist traditions were prominent in both polity and worship. They gave "The Riverside Way" its spirituality and popularity, while the Roman Catholic and Methodist traditions were strong enough to support the liturgical ceremonials that have made Riverside's worship so elegant. There has been, however, a decline in members who grew up with these traditions and they have been replaced by the growth of members with no affiliation in any denomination at all.

It is true that added together 81% of the respondents were raised in a specific religious denomination. But the numbers also show that 45% -- the "Nones" -- reported no religious affiliation at the present time. In addition, the denominations that show an increase within Riverside's membership are the United Church of Christ and (non-specific) Christian denominations, the most liberal of the mainline denominations and closest to the "Nones" in attitudes and beliefs.

With this strong secular infusion, what holds the congregation together as a Christian church? A progressive theology and the approach to all programs from a social justice perspective. These are the dominant reasons members come to Riverside and stay at Riverside. Just look at the "word cloud." When members and friends think of Riverside they think predominantly of social justice, followed by progressive/ inclusive/ diverse/ peace/ faith and welcome. When respondents are

asked “what brought you to Riverside” and “what keeps you at Riverside” they report that the top three reasons they continue to come to Riverside are that

- it is an interracial, multi-cultural church;
- it is committed to peace and justice; and
- it is a welcome and affirming church.

The friends and relationships they have made at Riverside and opportunities for service they find here also command their loyalty and we would expect that the new Senior Minister will bring many additional new members attracted to his/her ministry.

Riverside is, therefore, in a strong position for future growth. Its combination of social action and progressive theology is compatible with the “spiritual but not religious” attitude of the Nones. They will find a spirituality in Riverside’s openness to the new ideas of the changing demographics and to the moral imperative of justice in action that guides its mission in a dangerous and unstable world.

The older generations of long time members will continue to find comfort in the Sunday services that preserve the Christian traditions so evident in the powerful preaching and the beautiful music that touch the heart. And they remain at Riverside because of the community they can find nowhere else.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

Riverside is clear about its mission but it lacks a strong outreach program that communicates these strengths to those who need to know them. Its message needs to be recalibrated to emphasize:

- Riverside’s great experiment in living together as a multi-racial, multi-cultural congregation;
- Riverside’s continuing engagement in the work for peace and justice by marshalling its resources to help the marginalized and protect the environment;
- Riverside’s access to the spiritual practices and ministries of service that give its people strength and endurance.

Riversiders are generally satisfied with the programs and activities Riverside provides. They mention particularly Christian education and social services. But they believe spiritual development needs more emphasis. They list a cluster of spiritual activities that would help deepen their personal and spiritual relationship with God and reach out to those searching for God.

Reinstating the Wellness and Pastoral Counseling Center comes up often as a priority, undoubtedly because the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the conditions that arouse anxiety and feed violence. This trauma appears to be long term and widespread. It is not the only one, however.

The danger of global warming is now apparent in the extreme weather of floods and fires. The threat to our democracy from the dislocation of mass populations and the autocrats that enable them is now a reality. Anger and sorrow are everywhere. Riverside's respondents feel a pain that will not soon be ameliorated, and they want help.

To meet these threats the respondents have placed a high priority on:

- Building an online network of partnerships with progressive churches across the country (59%) and reviving the Fosdick Convocation to explore new understandings of progressive Christianity (63%);
- Training new members and leaders in Riverside's polity, worship and mission, placing these volunteers in ministries that will use their talents (66%) and developing a deacon board to assist the clergy in the pastoral care of the congregation (66%);
- Designing and modeling a program in restorative justice to overcome racism, misogyny, hate and violence with healing, peacemaking and love (65%);
- Providing spaces for re-training programs that will train and certify the unemployed for good jobs (77%), address the mental health challenges from the pandemic (79%), relieve food insecurity through everything from "food on the roof" programs to mobile groceries that carry inexpensive and healthy foods to food deserts (71%), provide aging-in-place housing for the elderly and customized housing for special needs populations (70%);
- Restructuring the physical plant to make it more flexible, green, welcoming, and income producing.

Riverside has strong identity as leader in progressive theology. It is united in its commitment to faith in action. It has a worldwide reputation that opens doors. It is blessed with an iconic building and material resources. What it lacks is a powerful communications/community action program to carry the good news abroad and make the good news a reality. What it wants is the spiritual strength and maturity to use its gifts for the glory of God, the healing of the people and the protection of creation.

There is no mention of "evangelism" in this Congregational Survey and many criticize Riverside for that. But they miss the point. Faith in action is the good news that Riverside brings to the world. It is the spiritual discipline that strengthens Riverside for the race. Faith in action is the way Riverside seeks God and finds a Savior.

CONCERNS

Finally, there are internal concerns that surfaced in the survey, apparent in written-in comments and suggestions. One concern is that taking on the good ideas generated by the survey may spread our resources too thin to the detriment of programs that we and other organizations are already doing well. The sustainability of every new venture would have to be convincing, but some are worried that a dysfunctional decision-making structure would drive away the entrepreneurial leadership key to creating mission consistent and revenue generating social enterprise initiatives.

Their worries come through in the open-ended question asking about the respondent's vision for the Next 90 Years. Here are some of their concerns:

Most importantly model and train good practices such as basics on how to run a meeting and recruit volunteers, how to set priorities and work together and stay on course from beginning to end of an effort.

I think the central question is: what is currently happening and working well at Riverside. Building on and expanding the partnerships and ministries that already exist seems like the best place to start and get maximum buy-in from the congregation and the community.

Preaching and hymns are the core of worship. They are the real experiences that will attract and retain people. They must not be neglected as we look for new avenues of service.

My lukewarm responses to some of these questions signal my unease about whether we could possibly establish and maintain some of the initiatives. Now we can't get enough volunteers to staff just the few (things we do well).

I have some concern about Riverside's becoming a "local" mission. Yes, we're part of a neighborhood and need to help out but we must not lose sight of our national and international presence.

One church cannot provide social services on a significant scale; it can only be achieved by coordination and collaboration among all faith groups, all secular social justice and social service orgs, so any program that partners with existing efforts is a good idea.

Why nothing about spiritual growth? As much as I value the justice emphasis those who are doing the work need to be self-aware and rooted in deep relationships with all. We need to be the source of Peace too.

Thank you for all the effort(s) that go into making me want to be here, even though I am not a member at this time. It may be that your ministry to the "world" outside the physical bounds of "the riverside church" and nyc will become a project to continue to examine.

These are not the comments of naysayers. They are the comments of people who love Riverside and believe that if the congregation is once again called out on mission it needs to go with its eyes wide open.

The Riverside Development Committee's Upper Manhattan *Community Needs Assessment and Partnership Study* calls on Riverside "to take bold action" to consolidate and restructure its local outreach ministries in order to help shape the future of New York City for the good of all who live here. Unifying the congregation around new directions will be difficult but the choice is irrelevancy or resurrection.

Riverside has the voice and credibility to assemble the individuals and institutions who care about reducing the inequities between the privileged and the marginalized. Riverside has the voice and credibility to equip the saints for action — the affordable housing advocates, the health-care providers, the politicians and educators, the corporate presidents and the block association activists, the millionaires, the civil servants and nonprofit experts, the artists and students.

And Riverside has the voice and credibility to spark a movement among these groups and individuals reminiscent of the Spirit's power 90 years ago. All are welcome.

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