



THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

CANDIDATES FOR LAY LEADERSHIP

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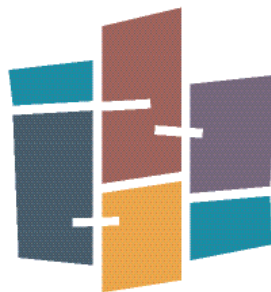
trcnyc.org/layleadership



Lay Leadership is the heartbeat of The Riverside Church.
As a congregational church the various commissions and committees lead the way as we aspire to embody the love and justice of God in our neighborhood, across the nation, and around the world.

Lay Leadership Candidate Forum
Sunday, April 26 | 1:00 PM ET | South Hall & Online

2026 Annual Meeting
Sunday, May 17 | 1:00 PM ET | South Hall & Online



THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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Olayemi Abioye

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

16 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

Riverside Church has been a positive influence in my life. Throughout my years at Riverside Church, I have been part of the Handbell Choir, the Beloved Earth Community, the African Fellowship and the Mission, Care and Parish Life Commission, among others. I have developed and taken part in programs and initiatives at Riverside Church. My son currently goes to Sunday School at Riverside. At this point when I can serve, I want to help ensure that Riverside Church continues to be a positive force in the lives of others at Riverside and in the surrounding community as well.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

Being an active member for so long, in different facets and areas of the church, I have a communal understanding of Riverside Church. Additionally, serving as the Chair of African Fellowship and being a member on the Mission, Care and Parish Life Commission, I have administrative knowledge and experience of how Riverside Church functions. Lastly, I was a director for many years within a healthcare institution, thus I bring other leadership and administrative experience.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I love music. My time as a member of the handbell choir at Riverside inspired me to learn how to play the cello. Nowadays, I share my passion for music by developing my son's ability to play the piano. You can check out his piano playing skills and the talents of our other young Riversiders at the annual Riverside Church Children's Talent Show.

Jerome Hairston



How long have you been a member at Riverside?

22 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

To further our diaconal work of carrying out the church's mission. This means providing support to the clergy in covenant with the congregation being mindful of our resources.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I have worked on Wallstreet and commercial real estate along with serving on many other nonprofits. What I think matters most is my love of God and Riverside. You see me at the door most Sunday's. I love serving this community and care to make sure this institution remains for present and future generations.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I enjoy Ushering the most. Nothing like the sense of purpose when you help someone and they, in turn, show gratitude with a smile or words of thanks. As the little children say, Church is not a steeple, it's the people." That guides and informs all I do as I feel my work is to serve God and love all as He loves us.

Lisa Hinds



How long have you been a member at Riverside?

27 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I feel called to serve as a member of the Church Council. I love the Lord and find real joy in building her kingdom. Not only has The Riverside Church helped to raise my daughter (now a college senior) but its teachings and ministries have served as my refuge during times of crisis. It would be an honor to continue to serve in this leadership capacity.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

The gifts, talents and experience I bring to this role are my love of the Lord; my steadfast commitment to The Riverside Church; my professional experience in finance, banking, and asset management; and my board and trustee experience in the NYC philanthropic nonprofit community. As an experienced nonprofit board director, I bring expertise in governance, fundraising as well as responsible stewardship. Further, I bring a unique perspective to fiduciary duty.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I am passionate about financial stewardship over our church's assets, which I know to be holy. I believe in the spiritual laws of living and giving and am personally excited about spreading the gospel of generosity.



Tawanna Huguley

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

3 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

While serving as a Lay Leader on Membership Care and Parish Life (MCPL), Stewardship Committee, Congregational Care Team, Spiritual Retreat, and Communion Preparation Team, I've become more in tune with the voices of our Congregants while understanding the needs, structure, and responsibilities of the Church.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

My professional background encompasses domestic and international work as an Executive Leader in Risk Management, Human Resources and Finance across multiple industries. My calling to serve extends from my professional and volunteer work to my training in End-of-Life Care and Crisis Incident Stress Management.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

My volunteer work advocating and empowering the unhoused, youth, older adult and disability populations exemplifies my passion for inspiring humanity, creativity, collaboration, and forward thinking. Eager to understand people of all backgrounds and listening to their journeys without bias.



Ernest Jones

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

41 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

So I can continue to serve Riverside and the members of our Congregation.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I have served as a member of the Racial Justice Initiative, Membership and Parish life Commission, co- chaired, The Mission and Social Justice Commission, The Common Table and the Greeters Ministry and have served on the church council. The skills that I bring that can be beneficial to church management were acquired in my professional career which included Director of training for a Consortium of advertising agencies in Manhattan, Director the training program at Grey Advertising, Chief of Conciliation and Director of Complaint Processing for the New York City Commission on Human Rights; The Equal Rights Manager at The US Department of Housing and Urban Development; the Department of Transportation (US Coast Guard), consultant for the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and VP for Equal Opportunity at the NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I receive great joy when I am able to provide assistance to someone that moves them to a better point from where they were.



Linda LeShanna

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

44 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I was honored to be appointed to the Church Council in June 2026 to serve until our 2026 Annual Meeting. I would be honored now to be elected so I can continue sharing my commitment, leadership experience, and skills to bring value to the ongoing work and mission of The Riverside Church and its members.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I am an active listener, a challenger of the status quo and an inquisitive problem solver. Throughout my 33-year professional career with Girl Scouts of the USA, and while serving for 10 years as the president of my 414-unit NYC condominium's volunteer Board of Managers, I have developed and evaluated strategic planning systems and managed cross-functional volunteer/staff teams to successfully partner to achieve specific strategic goals.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Ringin' with The Riverside Ringers brings me great joy! I am passionate about the work undertaken by TRC's Building Committee, on which I am currently a member, and our building staff. I am also passionate about, and volunteer to support, the ongoing work being done by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, currently serving over 11.2 million girls and young women in 153 countries and dedicated to helping our members develop their leadership skills to make a positive impact in their world. Global travel also brings me joy, adventure, and perspective. To date, 49 countries and 2 USA territories enjoyed. I'll be adding my 50th country in June 2026!



Rueben Martinez

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

18 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I want to serve the Congregation. I want to assist them with questions they may have. If I do not know answers to their questions, I will ask others who know better than me. I also enjoy cooperating with staff and other lay leaders to provide them with support and Congregational feedback. I also want to assist new lay leaders if necessary to give them confidence and support to contribute. As stated in 1 Timothy

4:12, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity”. I wish to share this message.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I have served on the Education Commission and Church Council previously. On the Education Commission, I have served as Secretary, Vice Chair, and Chair. I have served for 6 years on Church Council. For the first 3 years, I was the Education Commission representative. For my most recent 3 years, I was elected as an at large member and served as Treasurer. I also was a member of the Budget and Planning and Finance Committees. I have also volunteered for Lift Every Voice and Vote and for the Anti-Racism Task Force.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

My main gift is patience. I am slow to anger and am willing to listen to others whether I agree or disagree. I also try to be supportive to uplift others. Since I train financial professionals for licensing exams, I am familiar with financial statements and am willing to answer questions that others may have. I also enjoy teaching as I try to explain information in easy ways that people can understand. I have trained others in technology seminars at church.



A. Eric McFadden

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

13 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I am dedicated to developing a strategic vision for our church, encompassing its assets, justice initiatives, and fellowship mission.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

My background includes successful, extensive careers in government, politics, and both corporate and small business sectors. I offer broad experience in community development, government compliance, and over ten years of non-profit governance (St. George’s School). Additionally, I am a seasoned technologist with strong problem-solving skills.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I am deeply passionate about people, the culinary arts, and the advancement of Minority and Women-owned business development in technology.



Christian Rojas

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

28 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

During the past three years on Church Council, I have been involved as chair of the Building Committee, where we completed the stained glass window restoration project. I would like to continue contributing to the work of Church Council and any sub-committees to which I am assigned.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I teach and do research in organic chemistry at Barnard College, where I have also served in a variety of capacities, including department chair and on a range of faculty committees. I am committed to open discussion of challenges and collaborative decision making.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I enjoy the outdoors and can frequently be found in Riverside Park, communing with the plants and animals as well as “The Lordly Hudson.” I also enjoy poems, songs, and stories, and sharing these with others.



Jessie Wilkins

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

26 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I was appointed to the Church Council for a one-year term in 2025. Serving allows me to give my time, talent and stewardship in a way that lets me give back a small measure of the many blessings that God has given to me. I very much look forward to continuing to serve as a member of the Church Council.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

In serving, I intend to give a thoughtful and meaningful approach that requires listening to others first and then offering a response grounded in careful reflection. In my legal profession focusing on residential real estate, wills, and estate probate matters, I have given much effort to listening carefully when interacting with clients. The skills I have acquired in my law practice of nearly forty years enable me to participate more fully in lay leadership.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

It gives me great joy to interact regularly through social media, and otherwise, with my grandchildren who are all now either teenagers or young adults residing outside of the New York/New Jersey area.



Martha Wiggins

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

34 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I am currently finishing a one-year assignment on the Church Council, where I serve as a member of the Senior Ministers Committee, chair the Personnel and Salary Committee, and co-chair the newly formed Restorative Discipline Task Force. Each of these lay ministries is meaningfully woven into the broader life and health of the Church Council's ministries. As someone who highly values the role of education in preparing our members for lay and ordained leadership, I cannot think of a better time to serve on this body as it prayerfully re-envision its governing role in the life of our 21st-century congregation. Critical to our work is the intentional integration of members' voices in shaping that governance. I am excited about that direction and look forward to working with the Church Council, the Senior Minister, and the congregation to better embody that commitment to service through Jesus-centered love and mutual respect.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I have served on the Education Commission, The Riverside Church Archives Search Committee, the Ordination Committee, the Community Assessment & Partnership Subcommittee, and as co-designer & co-convenor of the series, Remember & Repair: Expanding Racial Justice & Equity in Church & Society. My broader career includes graduate school teaching; curriculum design and evaluation; conflict management and resolution; career pathing; creating, collecting, and curating oral histories; and grant writing and oversight. I have also served on many denominational boards and councils and mentored many budding leaders. The opportunity to serve in these settings has broadened my appreciation for those who have faithfully responded to Jesus' call to servant leadership.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Within the context of our congregation, my greatest joy is seeing our children and youth enthusiastically awaiting the ministers' call to join them on the chancel steps for The Message for All Ages. There is a rich resonance in their responses to the ministers' questions, observations, and opinions. Wisdom and experience emanate from these young minds and hearts; at times, a sermon breaks out! I salute the commitment of our teachers, clergy, musicians, and parents who value the meaning and practice of nurturing our young faith seekers in the Christian traditions and beyond. They are not just the future; they are changing our church and their worlds today. I also experience deep joy during our fun-filled intergenerational and niche post-worship gatherings. I value the power of our mixers; each social setting offers refreshing, even intimate, connections. Such centering and welcoming moments express the power of Jesus' love for us and our affirmation of it. I am passionate about strengthening these evolving ministries that promote self-care and member care.



Faith Miller-Sethi

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

I have been a member since November 2024, But I've been a frequent visitor for over three decades because I live just down a 10-minute walk away.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I joined the church in order to be a part of a community of people who share my values and to keep God more centered in my life. I'm still trying to be the best version of myself, and my parents taught me that centering God is a good strategy toward getting there. Unless I truly start serving at TRC, my membership will remain indistinguishable from my many years as a frequent visitor. Essentially, I think it's well past time that I got off of the sidelines and committed to being a part of and contributing to this rich community. I have a solid track record of professional and volunteer experience in nonprofit management, so the Budget and Planning Commission seems like a natural fit for me, while contributing the skills and knowledge I've honed over the years. I'm inherently a pragmatic visionary, so a person who's full of ideas but keenly attuned to budget and practical realities. I want to enhance our ability to foster a more enriching experience for our congregation and serve the needs of the community we reside within. I'm excited to be a part of building and planning in a way that fosters an ever greater sense of community, maximizing the potential of TRC.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I have a diverse professional background across sectors, with health equity (enhancing community wellness in all forms) as the core. I've overseen a hospital-based community development organization focused on affordable housing development in Harlem; served as a development officer; led a hospital-based mental health initiative within local faith communities in Harlem; overseen program development focused on child obesity; taught as a clinical professor in a medical school; driven business development to enhance social impact for a community intelligence platform (technology company). I have a master's and doctoral degree in public health, 90% complete MS in nonprofit management, and a bachelor's degree in history. Skills - project management/leadership; strategic foresight; data-informed decision making; financial development; business development; cross-functional leadership; community engagement; public health research and teaching/training. Volunteer experience/board work - college and grad school Black alumni groups; Jazzmobile; Durham Symphony Orchestra Development Committee Chair (multi-year); NYC public and independent school class parent; Oliver Scholars Program parent volunteer.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I'm passionate about many things, so the list of things that bring me joy includes spending quality time with family and friends, good conversation, and spending time in nature, especially NYC Parks, unspoiled beaches, and National Parks. I also enjoy good books; favorites include James and Lovesongs of W.E.B. Du Bois. I love great films, with favorites including American Fiction and Cinema Paradiso. Movement is important to me as well (lapsed runner/social dance), and I'm a recent fan of hiking and pickleball. I enjoy live performance and all arts and culture, especially music, as well as immersive international travel experiences. Great food, cooking, and hosting also bring me joy, along with real estate, creating beautiful spaces, and textiles.



Joseph Donica

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

14 months (since February 9, 2025).

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

Riverside has changed my life. It is a place where I have seen the work of Jesus lived out—in the nave, online, and in the streets. And I feel called to help sustain that work. I am drawn to the Budget & Planning Committee because I believe budgeting is a form of faithful discernment. The choices we make about our resources are the choices we make about our mission. I want to help ensure that Riverside continues to grow, serve, and respond to the needs of New York City and the world.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I am an English professor and scholar of American culture at Bronx Community College, CUNY, and a serious institutional thinker—attentive to how organizations make decisions, set priorities, and sustain their work over time. I believe that kind of thinking matters deeply at Riverside where we are called to steward both the needs of today and the future of the church. Through my work in PSC-CUNY, my faculty labor union, I serve on the Legislation Committee, an arm of the union that lobbies directly in Albany on state and city budget priorities. I work with legislators to shape funding for public higher education across New York. I also serve on the Delegate Assembly of my union where I engage in budget advocacy and governance. At Bronx Community College, I serve on the Strategic Planning Committee, where we align long-term institutional goals with resources in service of our mission to provide a world-class education to all New Yorkers. I have served on the executive boards of several academic and LGBTQ organizations, including The Center for LGBTQ Studies at CUNY, as well as on executive committees of the Modern Language Association. My community organizing and local electoral work has involved building coalitions across diverse communities and aligning shared values with practical action. As the son of a minister, I grew up watching how churches balance vision, ministry, and finances—an experience that gave me an early and enduring appreciation for stewardship and the care required to sustain a faith community at work in the world.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

My greatest joy is collective joy. Worshipping together at Riverside, running a marathon alongside strangers who become companions, raising my fist in the street alongside neighbors, belting out karaoke with my husband—these are the moments when I feel most alive and most grateful. I find deep joy in my teaching and research at CUNY, a place that reminds me daily why public education matters. And I find it here at Riverside, simply sitting in the nave, feeling held by something much larger than myself. I am passionate about institutions, like Riverside and CUNY, that bring people together across difference in pursuit of something meaningful and lasting. That is God’s work, and it is the work I want to support at Riverside.



Karen Diggs

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

19 years.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I feel a renewed calling to serve because I believe God has placed within me a heart specifically designed for connection and community. Stepping into the Nominating Committee after my time with MCPL is a natural extension of my faith—it is an opportunity to help others find their unique place in the body of Christ. I am deeply committed to fostering a church where every individual feels truly valued and seen. To me, being “seen” is more than a physical presence; it is a profound understanding of the human condition and our universal need for belonging. I want to contribute to a vibrant, inclusive community where service isn’t just a task, but a joyful reflection of God’s love in action.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

My background as Vice Chair and former co-chair of the Membership Commission has taught me the power of perspective, while my experience as a Rotarian reinforces my commitment to “Service Above Self.” My core strength is connectedness; I have a natural gift for seeing patterns and links that others might overlook. This ability to find common ground is a tool I use daily, whether I am bringing organizations together in my professional life or engaging in deep, one-on-one conversations with parishioners. I believe firmly that every person possesses a gift or talent—some are immediately obvious, while others are hidden gems waiting to be polished. God tells us this is so, and I make it my mission to recognize that potential in others. I lead with a relational approach rooted in integrity: I believe in what you say because I see what you do.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Laughter is my greatest passion—it is holy, restorative, and a reminder that God intends for us to find lightness even in our most meaningful work. Seeing people discover their God-given purpose fuels my spirit every day. I live by the mantra “**”Jesus, Others, Yourself” (JOY), which keeps me grounded in love. I also find deep joy in the familiarity of a vibrant, faith-based church that connects me not only to my Creator but to the strength and spirit of my ancestors. There is nothing quite like the delight of shared moments and God’s little surprises to remind us that we are part of something much larger than ourselves.



Barbara Mellor

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

Since 1991

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I believe it is important that we find those lay leaders who best serve the congregation, our church administration and our clergy.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

In my early years I taught church school with Patricia Ali and Ms. Adelaide Sackeyfio. I have been a member of the Education Commission and served on the Church Council as the education representative. I have also been a member of the Stewardship Committee, and I currently serve on the Scholarship Committee, the Building Committee, and Vice Chair of the Nominating Committee.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Since my retirement, I have been working at the food pantry weekly and I have often volunteered for the clothing sales. Serving those in our community that need our support is one of my passions. I find joy in attending Multifaith Mondays when I am able as it reminds me that we are all a part of a larger community of faith and all God's children are one. My new granddaughter, Luna, is what brings me the greatest joy.



Debra Lilly

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

I have been a member for 49 years.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I am interested in serving on the Education Commission because education has been a central passion in my life for nearly five decades. Since becoming a parent 49 years ago, I have been deeply invested in how learning shapes not only individual growth but also the strength and vitality of a community. I have seen firsthand how

education empowers people of all ages, building confidence, expanding perspective, and creating opportunities for meaningful connection and purpose. My interest spans generations. I care deeply about the young people in our church, as they are forming their identities and values, and I believe we have a responsibility to nurture their curiosity, faith, and sense of belonging. At the same time, I am equally committed to the aging members of our congregation, who bring wisdom, experience, and insight that should be honored, shared, and integrated into our collective learning.

I would bring to the commission both a lifetime of personal experience and a genuine desire to listen and collaborate. I am not only interested in sharing what I have learned over the years, but also in discovering the gifts and talents that already exist within our community. I believe education is most powerful when it is mutual and when we create space for people to teach and learn from one another. Serving on the Education Commission would allow me to help foster that kind of environment, one where people feel valued, engaged, and inspired. I am especially interested in helping to bridge gaps between generations, encourage participation, and ensure that our educational offerings reflect both the needs and the richness of our congregation.

Ultimately, I see this role as an opportunity to contribute to a culture of lifelong learning within the church, one that strengthens our faith, deepens our relationships, and equips us all to grow together.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

The gifts I bring to this role include a depth of life experience, a commitment to nonjudgmental engagement, and an ability to foster inclusive, respectful dialogue. I value creating space where all voices are welcomed and heard, and where each person feels their perspective matters. I strive to engage others in a way that is appreciative and open, recognizing that everyone has something meaningful to contribute and that we are strongest when we learn from one another. I would bring to the commission both a willingness to share what I have learned and a genuine desire to listen. I am especially interested in reaching out to members of our community to help identify and uplift their talents, so that our educational efforts reflect the richness and diversity already present among us.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Family brings me great joy, including the extended family I have been blessed to build beyond biological ties. I truly love connecting with people, those I have known for years and those I am just meeting, and engaging in meaningful conversation. Travel has also been a powerful teacher in my life, giving me opportunities to meet people from different cultures, learn from their experiences, and bring those perspectives back to share with others. I also believe joy and laughter are essential parts of learning and community. A sense of humor helps create connection, ease, and openness, and I value the role that laughter plays in bringing people together.



Gloria Moy

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

I have been a member of Riverside Church since October 2024.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I am a 2018 graduate from New York Theological Seminary, and am a retired police dispatcher for the MTA, I want to serve on the Membership Care and

Parish Life Comision because I believe that members and visitors alike should be welcomed to the church, and to become part of the life of the church. One thing that I believe is important is be aware of members who have not been in church, and to reach out to them to see if they are okay and if there is anything, I can do, or with the person's permission, refer that person to the ministers.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I bring my desire to help people. In 2005, I was a member of the Disaster Medical Assistance Team, that responded to Lake Charles, Louisiana, after Hurricane Rita. As a member of the team, I helped provide medical support to the citizens of Lake Charles, since there were no local resources available. I am also a member of Team Rubicon, which is a volunteer disaster response veteran run and lead, that has responded in the aftermath of natural disasters. My desire to become an EMT and also volunteer in disaster response, comes from living through the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. I swore that I would never be rendered useless in a disaster. I believe that this is where God has been calling me, to do service and take care of each other, especially those would are in need. I currently volunteer at the Food Pantry as a Food Pantry Host. Volunteering at the pantry has been a gift. Though, the majority of our clients are Hispanics, and there may be a language barrier, just knowing that the clients are being treated with dignity, and they will have food for their families. Hunger and need does not discriminate.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I am that person who will run toward a disaster. One of my passions is helping to raise money through Blood Cancer United and St, Baldricks to fund research to maybe have cure someday. This is very near and dear to my heart as a three time cancer survivor, and I have been blessed by the work Blood Caner United has done and continues to do. One of the chemo drugs was brought to market because of the work of Blood Cancer United. Clearly, God is not done with me yet.



Ken Cummings

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

I have been a proud member since 1989

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

The hope is to get to know a community with the same goals. Peace love Understanding

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

As a Corporation Compliance Officer, I have found that working in a team meets goals with benefits to all.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

There have been many opportunities to volunteer with joy over the year. (Flower Guild, MPL, Safe Haven, Men's Overnight Shelter, Usher, Senior Minister Assistance)



Juliet Owuor

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

After coming to Riverside for a year and during that time I have found it to be a place of spiritual grounding, reflection, and community. It is why I became a member in October 2024.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I feel called to serve because I value being part of a community that actively supports and uplifts others. Riverside has been a meaningful space for me, and I would like to contribute more intentionally to its growth and care. Serving in this role feels like an opportunity to give back, to listen, and to help create an environment where others feel seen, supported, and spiritually nourished. I want to be part of work that not only acknowledges inequity but actively responds to it with compassion, intention, and consistency. Serving in this role feels like a meaningful way to contribute to that work and to help create spaces where people feel supported, respected, and seen.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I bring a thoughtful and observant perspective, along with a strong sense of empathy and attentiveness to others. In both my paths in art and in engineering, I have learned the importance of patience, communication, and finding ways to see beyond the mechanical. I am collaborative, open to learning, and committed to expanding our reasons for justice.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I am deeply passionate about art, particularly painting, as a way of capturing fleeting moments and emotion. Creating allows me to reflect, process, and share beauty with others in a tangible way. I also find joy in connection—whether through quiet conversations, shared experiences, or simply being present with others.



Perry Greene

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

I have been a member since 2007

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I am currently a member on a one year appointment, and I would welcome the chance to continue the work of the Commission in a more extended capacity.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

I am retired, but I spent my professional career of 50 years in several aspects of education. I have a doctorate in English education. I have taught at the elementary, secondary and college levels. I have been a professor, associate dean, associate provost and a vice president at the university level. The last 10 years of my career, I was responsible for DEI programs at the university. I feel I can bring my professional experience and a spirit of empathy and grace to my role as a member of the Commission.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

My family, including my grandchildren (and one great grand) give me joy. My passion for justice, democracy, and human rights (Christ's path) is rooted in securing a future that, for them, is fair, just and respectful of who they are as unique individuals.



Eleanor Evans

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

I have been attending the Riverside church since 1968. I became a member sometime during the tenure of Rev. James A Forbes, not sure what year.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I would like to serve on the Mission and Social justice commission because I have a great respect for Rev. Mira Sawlani-Joyner and all she is trying to accomplish. I feel she believes in bringing people into the saving knowledge of God and what can be accomplished if we believe and never give up. I believe in helping those who have suffered for decades under unjust treatment and cruel actions through no fault of their own.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

In the past, I have worked with Betty Davis in the Youth Entrepreneur Program, with Mariah Britton on Career Day, and with Ruth Watson in the English Conversation Partners Program. I also worked with the “Safe Haven” shelter program with Rev. Northern. None of these programs are active today at Riverside Church.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Nothing brings me more joy than skiing from the top of a long trail mountain in Europe, Lake Tahoe, or Vermont on a bright, cold, sunny winter day, or mountain biking on long bike trails in late summer or early fall in Vermont. I am also an avid follower of women’s basketball, tennis, and soccer. I also enjoy learning new things, such as using and applying AI in new and different ways. I have a background in economics, social work, and business. I have a BS, MS, and MBA from Columbia University. I am currently involved with the Black Business Students at CU and was treasurer of the Black Alumni Council for eight years, where I was responsible for raising money for undergraduate student scholarships.



Irene King

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

23 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

I wish to continue serving on the Worship Commission because, as a member of the Riverside Choir, I feel I have served as an integral part of Worship for the 28 years I have been in the Choir. I also served on Worship for two separate terms some years ago, and I have been serving in an appointed role on the Commission for the past year, so I have extensive experience in this role. Worship is very important to me, as it is to our church, and I hope to continue to work with the Commission to enhance our worship such that the congregation is inspired, engaged, and blessed at every worship service

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

My former experiences on the Worship Commission enable me to function effectively as a current member. My close involvement with worship at Riverside gives me insight and institutional knowledge to support worship. Finally, I think one of my most valuable qualities to the Commission is being a calm, reasonable person, thinking collaboratively, and keeping at top of mind the pursuit of excellence in worship.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I am passionate about music in all its forms and, in particular, singing. Praying, worshiping and just spending time with our wonderful congregants and clergy bring me great joy.



Karissa Garner

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

Karissa became a member of the Riverside Church in 2016 while attending classes at New York Theological Seminary.

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

It is through worship that we praise God and heal God's people. While remaining true to the sacredness of praise and worship, my goal is to be a servant leader by offering my background and faith walk. Being a part of this holy commission that honors tradition while acknowledging all God's people would be an honor for me.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

During her time at Riverside, she became involved in Conversation Partners as an English-speaking partner and later interned at the Shower Project and the pantry. Karissa is a former employee of the New York City Human Resources Administration. Karissa has also conducted research for the Association of Theological Schools and completed an internship at the New Jewish Home in the field of chaplaincy. Karissa holds an MDiv from New York Theological Seminary and a BS in business from the University of Phoenix. She recently completed an IT certification in Python coding.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

Born in Brooklyn, Karissa now lives in Harlem with her 15-year-old son Isaac. Karissa enjoys engaging in student advocacy. She is also active in speaking out for underserved families. While Karissa spends most of her time with her family and pets, she also loves cooking, baking, and learning new things.



Olger Twyner III

How long have you been a member at Riverside?

35 years

Why do you want to serve on this commission/committee/council?

Worship is central to Riverside Church. Worship is the heartbeat of Riverside Church, and through service on the Worship Commission, I hope to help shape experiences that nurture spiritual growth and foster meaningful connections among congregants and with God. In collaboration with clergy and fellow members, I look forward to offering my gifts in music, organization, and creativity in ways that support others on their spiritual journeys. Riverside’s diversity is one of its greatest strengths, and its worship should reflect and embrace that richness—welcoming people of all backgrounds, ages, and preferences while honoring cherished traditions and maintaining thoughtful structure. I am eager to work alongside fellow commission members to build relationships and help advance the church’s mission through worship that is both meaningful and inclusive.

What gifts, talents, and experience (personal, professional, or volunteer) do you bring to this role/position?

During the early years of my involvement with Riverside, I served in a variety of lay leadership roles, including the Membership and Parish Life Commission, Every Member Canvass, Scholarship Committee, English Conversation Program, Building Committee, Budget and Planning Committee, and Clinical Pastoral Education Committee. I am now retired, having built a career as a public interest lawyer, higher education administrator, and nonprofit manager. Throughout my professional life, I led and supported initiatives centered on public service, social justice, community development, youth engagement, educational access, and cross-cultural understanding. My experience includes financial management, fundraising, strategic planning, staff development, and the effective use of innovative technologies. As a long-time Harlem resident, I have also been deeply engaged in education-focused volunteer work with organizations such as the Harlem YMCA, the Children’s Aid Society, Sponsors for Educational Opportunity, East Harlem Tutorial Program, and the Harlem Educational Activities Fund. Drawing on the breadth of my professional and volunteer experience, I bring a well-developed perspective and a strong foundation of skills that enable me to serve effectively in this role.

Tell us something about yourself that brings you joy or that you are passionate about.

I greatly enjoy ringing handbells with the Riverside Ringers, an experience that brings both musical fulfillment and a strong sense of community. Outside of that, I am an avid New York Yankees fan who takes pleasure in both watching games and attending them in person. I am also a proud “bandhead,” with a deep appreciation for marching bands—especially the rich traditions of HBCU band culture. In my free time, I enjoy baking and traveling, exploring destinations both across the United States and abroad.

Lay Leadership Candidate Forum
Sunday, April 26 | 1:00 PM ET | South Hall & Online

2026 Annual Meeting
Sunday, May 17 | 1:00 PM ET | South Hall & Online





THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK