

New York Megachurch Picks First Female Pastor in 84-Year History

New York's Riverside Church, one of the best-known liberal Protestant congregations in the United States, selected a woman to lead it for the first time in its 84-year history, the church said on Monday.

The Rev. Amy Butler was elected on Sunday as the church's seventh senior minister after a two-year search. Butler has served as the senior minister of the Washington-based Calvary Baptist Church since 2003 and spent years before that ministering to homeless women in New Orleans, according to the church's website.

The previous senior minister for the church, the Rev. Brad Braxton, resigned in 2009 about a year after being selected, citing divisions in the congregation about the church's future.

"Riverside Church, you are a remarkable community of faith. You have a grand history and a prominent public voice, it's true. But the deepest strength and richest beauty of this community is found in all of you," Butler wrote in a letter on the church's website on Monday.

Butler will take the helm of the 1,600-member congregation in mid-September, following her departure from Washington in July.

The interdenominational Riverside Church in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of Upper Manhattan was built by American financier John D. Rockefeller Jr. and held its first service in 1930. It has hosted speakers including the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela. It is a

member of the American Baptist Churches and the United Church of Christ.

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