

Amy Butler leaves Riverside Church

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [August 14, 2019](#) issue

Amy Butler, the first female pastor to lead the Riverside Church in New York City, is leaving the historic progressive church. After five years at Riverside, Amy Butler will not renew her contract as senior minister, according to a statement from Butler and the church council posted on the church's website.

Neither the pastor nor the church council gave a reason for Butler's departure or indicated what she might do next. The update noted, "both she and our congregational leadership have been prayerfully discerning how best to fulfill the work of God in the world to which they are called."

[A July 11 report in the *New York Times* cited supporters of Butler who said she was leaving the job because she had spoken up against harassment and pursued better treatment for women and minorities. Her persistence strained an increasingly fractured relationship between her and the church's lay leaders, *Times* sources said. The report quoted Kevin Wright, a former executive minister at the church, as saying about Butler's departure, "There is absolutely no doubt that sexism played a role."

But according to the *Times*, others in the congregation pointed to the council's misgivings about changes Butler made to church staff, programs, and spending priorities.]

Butler was named pastor at Riverside in 2014. She previously served as senior pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

The Riverside Church Council said it was "proud" of the work the church has done under Butler's leadership.

"Our beautiful, beloved congregation is vibrant and growing, and our programs are setting the model for resourcing the needs of the progressive Christian community," it said in the statement.

The Riverside Church is affiliated with American Baptist Churches USA and the United Church of Christ. Michael Livingston will act as interim senior minister while Riverside searches for Butler's successor. —Religion News Service