

The Riverside Church

Individual Landmark

481 Riverside Drive

Designation Date: May 16, 2000



The Riverside Church. Photo by Lorraine Colbert

Located in Morningside Heights on a high bluff overlooking the Hudson River, The Riverside Church is one of the best known religious structures in New York City. An ecumenical church, with its roots in the Baptist faith, its history reflects the modernist religious theology of its founding pastor, Harry Emerson Fosdick.

Financed with gifts from members of the church, including the industrialist and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr., the neo-Gothic style complex, built between 1928 and 1930, consists of three distinct sections: a five-bay nave and chancel extending north toward West 122nd Street; a mid-block 22-story tower housing the narthex, Christ Chapel, belfry, offices, and meeting rooms; and a one-and-a-half story "cloister" passage extending east to Claremont Avenue. The architects, Henry C. Pelton of New York, and Allen & Collens of Boston, based their design on mainly French Gothic structures, especially the Cathedral at Chartres.

An Indiana limestone curtain wall disguises the building's steel frame , which was used to speed construction and support the immense weight of the 72-bell carillon housed in the tower's upper stories, donated in honor of Laura Spelman Rockefeller. Built in an era when most Manhattan churches were literally being overshadowed by corporate and residential skyscrapers, the 392-foot high tower provided the new congregation with a strong presence on the skyline and in Morningside Heights. A symbol of the congregation and its progressive beliefs, The Riverside Church continues Fosdick's mission of being " interdenominational, interracial, and international."

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)