



REV. DR. JAMES ALEXANDER FORBES, JR. Biography

The Rev. Dr. James Alexander Forbes, Jr., is National Minister of the Drum Major Institute, Senior Minister Emeritus of the Riverside Church, the Harry Emerson Fosdick Distinguished Professor at Union Theological Seminary, and President of the Healing of the Nations Ministries (all of these institutions of New York City). Additionally, Dr. Forbes is a highly-acclaimed author, scholar and nationally sought-after speaker, affectionately referred to in national and international religious circles as the *preacher's preacher* because of his extensive preaching career and his charismatic style.

Newsweek magazine once recognized Forbes as one of the 12 “most effective preachers” in the English-speaking world. As a passionate educator, administrator, community and human rights activist and interfaith leader, Dr. Forbes was twice designated as one of America’s greatest Black preachers by *Ebony* magazine. Dr. Forbes is a featured TEDex speaker and also a frequent guest & contributor to top national media outlets including Huffington Post, MSNBC and others.

As Senior Minister of the Riverside Church—an interdenominational, interracial, and international church built by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in 1927, Dr. Forbes led a 2,400 member church. Affiliated with the American Baptist Churches and the United Church of Christ, Forbes was installed as the fifth senior minister of Riverside on June 1, 1989 and retired on June 1, 2007. He was the first African-American to serve as minister of this multicultural congregation. Dr. Forbes is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches.

Before being called to Riverside’s pulpit, Dr. Forbes served from 1976-1985 as the Brown and Sockman Associate Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. From 1985-1989, he was Union’s first Joe R. Engle Professor of Preaching. Union named him the first Harry Emerson Fosdick Adjunct Professor of Preaching in 1989, when he accepted the pastorate at Riverside. Dr. Forbes has served on the Core Teaching Staff at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York.

Dr. Forbes has earned three degrees and has been awarded 14 honorary degrees. He earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, NY; a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City, NY; and a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from Howard University in Washington, D.C. He earned his clinical pastoral education certificate from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, VA. His alma mater, Union Theology Seminary, presented him its Unitas Distinguished Alumnus Award, and Teacher’s College of Columbia University awarded him its Distinguished Service Medal in 2003. Howard University awarded him their Distinguished Service Award in Ministry. His honorary doctorates include degrees from the following colleges and universities: Princeton, DePauw, Colgate, Fairleigh Dickenson, Lehigh and the University of Richmond.

From 1992 to 2007, Dr. Forbes was co-chair of A Partnership of Faith, an interfaith organization of clergy among New York’s Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim communities. He is on the board of Manhattanville College, the Interfaith Alliance, Children’s Defense Fund, Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, and the United Way. He is a past president of the Martin Luther King Fellows. Dr. Forbes is also a member of Mayor DiBlasio’s Clergy Advisory Council in New York City.

Additionally, two of Dr. Forbes’ songs have been published in the Silver Burdett Songbooks for schools: “For Children Safe and Strong” and “Our Families Together.” Dr. Forbes has performed the narration for several large musical productions, including Mendelssohn’s “Elijah” with the Riverside choir.

In 2016, Dr. Forbes participated in “The Revival: Time for a Moral Revolution of Values,” a national tour to redefine morality in American politics and challenge leaders of faith and moral courage to be more vocally opposed to harmful policies that disproportionately impact the poor, people who are ill, children, immigrants, communities of color, and religious minorities. Dr. Forbes was joined by the Rev. William Barber, II, the Rev. Traci Blackmon and Sister Simone Campbell.

In the fall of 2018, Dr. Forbes offered a lecture series entitled “Preaching and the Next Great Awakening” at Shaw University Divinity School to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He is currently teaching a course, “Preaching Jubilee Justice,” at Duke University Divinity School.

Born in 1935 in Burgaw, North Carolina, Dr. Forbes is married to Bettye Franks Forbes, formerly of San Antonio, TX. They are the proud parents of one son, James A. Forbes, III and two grandchildren, Hannah Rose and James IV.