

***ONTARIO***  
**JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL**  
**(The United Church of Canada)**

**B E T W E E N:**

**REVEREND GRETTA VOSPER**

**Appellant**

**-and-**

**THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the GENERAL COUNCIL**

**Respondent**

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**REPLY AFFIDAVIT OF RANDY BOWES**

(Pursuant to Section 13.7.6 of The United Church of Canada's Appeals Resource, August 2013)

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October 30, 2015

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**JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL**  
**(The United Church of Canada)**

**BETWEEN:**

**REVEREND GRETTA VOSPER**

**Appellant**

**-and-**

**THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the GENERAL COUNCIL**

**Respondent**

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**REPLY AFFIDAVIT OF RANDY BOWES**

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I, Randy Bowes, of the City of Markham, in the Province of Ontario, MAKE OATH AND SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I am the Chair of the Board of the West Hill United Church (“WHUC”) and as such have knowledge of the matters to which I herein depose.
  
2. I swear this affidavit on behalf of the members and adherents of WHUC. I make this affidavit in support of WHUC’s Minister, Reverend Gretta Vosper, in response to issues raised in the General Secretary’s materials, including the affidavit of Cynthia Gunn (Sworn October 16, 2015).

3. The General Secretary's materials raise the following issues:
  - i. The size of WHUC's congregation from the years 1997 to 2014, which is discussed in Cynthia Gunn's affidavit at paragraphs 27 through 29; and,
  - ii. The letter from Reverend David W. Allen to Nora Sanders, dated April 20, 2015 which is attached to Cynthia Gunn's affidavit as Exhibit A.
4. Further, since Rev. Vosper submitted her initial materials on September 18, 2015, additional correspondence has been received by both Reverend Vosper and WHUC regarding the review of Reverend Vosper. This correspondence is described below and attached as an exhibit to this Affidavit.

#### **WHUC's Membership Numbers**

5. The Respondent's materials raise the issue of WHUC's fluctuating membership numbers between 1997 and 2014, with a particular focus on WHUC's membership from 2001 to 2014. [see Cynthia Gunn's Affidavit, sworn October 16, 2015, at paragraphs 27-29]
6. WHUC's records indicate that WHUC had 315 members in 2002 and 204 members in 2003. WHUC's records indicate that this large removal of members between 2002 and 2003 was due to WHUC's Board taking action to officially remove names of people who had been inactive in the congregation for many years.
7. Thereafter, WHUC's numbers remained stable from 2003 until 2008. WHUC began losing in 2008 with most of those losses recorded in 2009.

8. However, looking at WHUC's numbers in isolation does not tell the whole story. If you look at other United Church congregations in the same region (ie. in the Scarborough area), which remained open but did not experience one-time gains in membership through amalgamation during the time period 2004 - 2014 (only twelve of twenty-one congregations fall under that description), you will find that the figures demonstrate WHUC's strengths. Find below a chart which lists changes in resident and non-resident members, new members by profession of faith and transfer and new members as a percentage of 2004 members. WHUC has amassed the below figures from the United Church of Canada's published Annual Statistics books for the most recently recorded decade, from 2004 to 2014.

<b>CONGREGATION</b>	<b>CHANGE IN RESIDENT AND NON- RESIDENT MEMBERSHIP, 2004 - 2014</b>	<b>NEW MEMBERS BY PROFESSION OF FAITH AND TRANSFER, 2004 - 2014</b>	<b>NEW MEMBERS AS PERCENTAGE OF 2004 MEMBERSHIP 2004 - 2014</b>
Church of the Master	↓ 34%	51	26%
Ebenezer	↓ 34%	13	8%
Knob Hill	↓ 13%	30	22%
Knox United, Scar.	↓ 53%	93	21%
Malvern Emmanuel	↓ 52%	3	3%
St. John's, Scar.	↓ 58%	99	39%
St. Mark's	↓ 21%	81	46%
Toronto Chinese	↓ 19%	55	23%
Victoria Park	↓ 38%	10	8%
West Ellesmere	↓ 79%	9	9%

<b>West Hill</b>	↓ 27%	<b>76</b>	<b>37%</b>
Wexford Heights	↓ 58%	26	6%
<b>Average</b>	↓ 40.5%	<b>45.5</b>	<b>20.6%</b>

9. The above chart depicts a story where *many* United Church congregations in the Scarborough region are experiencing significant decreases in congregational sizes, with the average decrease being 40.5%. This is reflective of a national trend and concern that membership in the United Church of Canada as a whole is declining. Even with the significant losses WHUC has experienced, its membership numbers have reduced far less than many other local congregations. By comparison, WHUC has experienced a 27% decrease for the same time period.
10. The average numbers of *new members* by transfer or by profession of faith, is 45.5 persons per congregation over 2004 to 2014. In the same time period, WHUC has added 76 new members to its roster. We should note that all 76 of those new members are adults; WHUC does not do confirmation classes for adolescents or youth - a cohort that is statistically unlikely to remain in church following confirmation - which *may* account for a portion of membership increases in other congregations.
11. If you calculate the addition of new members as a percentage of the listed congregation's 2004 membership numbers, WHUC's new members added between 2004 and 2014 represents a 37% increase to its 2004 membership numbers. The average for the listed congregations in the Scarborough region was 20.6%. We should note that most of WHUC's new members came from *outside* of the United Church.

12. The overall point however is to acknowledge that many congregations are struggling with decreases in congregational size reflective of national trends. While WHUC has not been immune to experiencing decreases in congregational size, WHUC has performed better when compared to other congregations in the same region.
13. Most importantly, as I indicated in my initial affidavit sworn on September 18, 2015, a review of the Reverend Vosper's effectiveness is by extension a review of the effectiveness of WHUC's ministry as a whole. Further, any discussion of our Minister's suitability reflects on the suitability of our congregation's continued membership within the UCC. With declining membership an ever present trend, the UCC should be concerned about potentially excluding a minister who enjoys support from the current members of WHUC. Please refer to the letter from the WHUC congregation sent to Reverend Ransom on June 17, 2015 which was signed by **70 members** and adherents of WHUC's congregation. A copy of this letter was attached as Exhibit "L" to my September 18, 2015 affidavit.
14. The United Church should be working to keep the doors open of congregations who wish to remain a part of the wider United Church community and not acting in a way that could lead to the continued loss of members.

**Correspondence from Reverend David Allen to Nora Sanders, Dated April 20, 2015**

15. In Cynthia Gunn's Affidavit, Ms. Gunn indicates that the General Secretary's Ruling was in response to a request from Rev. David Allen. Ms. Gunn states that this request came in the form of a letter dated April 20, 2015. A copy of the letter is attached to Ms. Gunn's affidavit as Exhibit A.

16. The General Secretary has argued in her written materials that the April 20, 2015 correspondence does not identify Reverend Vosper. Further the General Secretary indicates that she did not review any materials that identified Reverend Vosper. Ms. Gunn indicates in her affidavit that “[n]o documents or materials pertaining to the appellant were included with the letter and none were considered by the General Secretary in making her ruling.” [see Cynthia Gunn’s Affidavit, sworn October 16, 2015, at paragraph 2].
17. No member of WHUC, in particular myself and Reverend Vosper, were previously aware or had seen a copy of this April 20, 2015 correspondence until it was provided as part of the General Secretary’s materials.
18. Having now had a chance to review this April 20, 2015 letter, I am of the opinion that there is no possible way that the General Secretary could not have connected the request for a process concerning an ordained minister with the well-known Reverend Vosper. The letter clearly concerns a *female* ordained minister who is a self-described atheist from Toronto Conference.
19. Reverend Vosper is well known not only within Toronto Conference, but in the broader United Church community and also internationally. Reverend Vosper is a published author with a public media profile. Within the United Church, Reverend Vosper has been described as an atheist in the United Church Observer on several occasions, as recently as the May 2015 edition, in an article titled “Confronting the Unbelievers”.
20. Notwithstanding that the April 20, 2015 letter does not go so far as to *explicitly* name Reverend Vosper, there was ample description in the letter to identify Reverend Vosper by

her well-known public reputation alone. We cannot comprehend how it could be the case that, through the normal course of her duties, the General Secretary did not become aware of the controversy raised within the United Church by Reverend Vosper's identification as an atheist, and the *uniqueness* of that claim within the UCC, such that the General Secretary would not have known that the subject of the Toronto Conference's request was Reverend Vosper.

#### **Further Correspondence Regarding Review of Reverend Gretta Vosper**

21. In my initial September 18, 2015 affidavit, I included a sizeable compendium of correspondence received by both Reverend Vosper and WHUC regarding the review of Reverend Vosper. The compendium was attached to my initial affidavit as Exhibit "S". The compendium included hundreds of letters, emails, and notes through social media from all over Canada and internationally. I attached this compendium of correspondence to demonstrate that the potential review of Reverend Vosper raised essential questions about the Church's understanding of ministry. The General Secretary, in her written materials, mistakenly described this material as "expressing support and concern" for Reverend Vosper (see paragraph 98). The correspondence deliberately included both supportive *and critical* views regarding Reverend Vosper. The point of this compendium was to demonstrate that this potential review of Reverend Vosper has sparked a *widespread* debate about the Church's understanding of ministry.
22. Since Reverend Vosper filed her Statement of Argument and supporting materials on September 18, 2015, both Reverend Vosper and WHUC have continued to receive further such correspondence. The Reverend Vosper has assembled a compendium of written and

email correspondence, received post September 18, 2015 until the date of this affidavit, a true copy of which is attached to this affidavit as **Exhibit “A”**.

23. In particular, I wish to draw your attention to three compelling letters which speak not only to the degree of attention garnered by Reverend Vosper’s case, but also that Reverend Vosper case continues to raise essential questions about the United Church’s understanding of ministry, theological belief, and *fairness* towards its ordained members.
24. On September 29, 2015, Ron Henderson, Chair of the Board of the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church wrote to the Moderator, the General Secretary, David Allen and Bryan Ransom, stating:

“...the Board has instructed me to write on behalf of the congregation of Southminster-Steinhauer United Church to express our dismay and dissatisfaction with the process Toronto Conference is undertaking with respect to the Rev. Gretta Vosper. To undertake a review is certainly antithetical to the approach we would expect to address differences in doctrine, belief and theology within our denomination. ...

In a church that values justice, equity and diversity, it is deeply disturbing that a conference would initiate a review of this nature which is not mandated by The Manual of the UCC but is based on an opinion given by the General Secretary of the United Church of Canada. ...

It may be entirely appropriate (perhaps even decades overdue) for the UCC to address what “essential agreement” means in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and 90 years after the union that created The United Church of Canada. But surely such a question belongs to a process entirely different than the one that Toronto Conference is undertaking. Surely such a question does not belong within disciplinary proceedings like a review but in study, dialogue and conversation across the church.”

A true copy of the letter from Ron Henderson to the leadership of the United Church and Toronto Conference is attached to this affidavit as **Exhibit “B”**.

25. On October 1, 2015, Bishop John Shelby Spong wrote an open letter to Moderator Cantwell stating:

“I write with some alarm at what is happening in the United Church of Canada, a church that I have long admired. I recall your history. Your church decided that women were not to be excluded from ordination long before the first woman ever applied. In 1988 your church proclaimed that homosexual people were not ineligible for ordination. That stand resulted in a loss of members, but your church responded to that loss with a campaign slogan that rang throughout Canada: “Proud to be United.” The rest of the Christian world rejoiced to witness your passion for truth....

I have written articles in praise of the United Church of Canada. It was the one Christian body in the world that seemed free of the need to be tied to the past, but was rather courageously open to the future. Now to my dismay, a segment of the United Church of Canada has decided that it is no longer secure enough or open enough to contain one of its most creative, future-oriented pastors. I refer to the Rev. Gretta Vosper of the West Hill United Church in Toronto.....

Such a church will look “heroic”, only to an increasingly neurotic band of “true believers,” who think they can protect God from knowledge and it will become the laughing stock of the members of our increasingly secular society, who are quite sure they want nothing to do with the kind of Christianity that you will then represent. I grieve over the direction in which at least some parts of the United Church of Canada are now walking. I urge you, as the leader of that church, to call your church back from this precipice.” [Excerpted]

A true copy of Bishop John Shelby Spong’s open letter to Moderator Cantwell is attached to this affidavit as **Exhibit “C”**.

26. On October 1, 2015, Rev. Dr. Nancy Steeves of the Southminster-Steinhauer United Church sent a letter addressing the Moderator, the General Secretary, David Allen and Bryan Ransom, stating:

“I am writing to each of you as one who chose to find spiritual community within the United Church of Canada and one who has been proud to be identified as ministry personnel within the UCC for 17 years of my 34 years of ordered ministry. I was raised in a denomination that excluded me from the vocation of

ministry on the basis of my gender. I was ordained in a denomination that sought to exclude me from the vocation of ministry on the basis of my sexual orientation. I was drawn to The United Church of Canada because it has made space for a wide theological spectrum and has been a leader in seeking social, personal and global justice. I am alarmed and ashamed at the actions of my spiritual community in instigating a review which has the potential to exclude a colleague for rooting her spirituality and her ministry in values rather than beliefs. ...

Given that Ms. Vosper has publically expressed her nonbelief in a theistic, interventionist, supernatural being called “God” for more than a decade, one is left to speculate about what the particular “concerns” could possibly be that would give rise to a review at this point in time. What motivates a conference to review Ms. Vosper now when her theology and praxis have been a matter of public record since the publication of her first book in 2004? ...

It is deeply disturbing to read the request to the General Secretary as framed by the executive of Toronto Conference. On the face of it, it is difficult to discern a genuine and sincere inquiry in that request. The General Secretary appears to have been asked a rhetorical question. The desired answer is entirely implied in the question. ...

While The Manual clearly authorizes the General Secretary to rule on “questions about polity, procedures and practices of the United Church,” (E.4.2.3(f)) it is difficult to imagine that this provision was intended to empower any single individual to design a process that would lead to an unprecedented review. It is inconceivable that a denomination which has designed a complex process of church wide consultation through proposals and remits would delegate the power to construct a process which could lead to the remedial or disciplinary outcomes provided for in J.9.4 of The Manual to an individual. ...

With all due respect to the opinion of the General Secretary, the conclusion that suitability for ordered ministry is synonymous with effectiveness in ministry has laid the foundation for an unfair and flawed process. To initiate what amounts to a disciplinary process in this matter is unjust, misguided and harmful not only to the ministry personnel in question, the congregation most affected but also to the ethos and reputation of the United Church of Canada and therefore affects all of us who are members or ministry personnel within the denomination.

The energy, stress and expense of these proceedings is inappropriate and unwarranted in a situation where there is no breach of ethics or breakdown in pastoral relations which give rise to an unprecedented review. Thank you [for] your consideration of this matter.” [Excerpted]

A true copy of the letter from Rev. Dr. Nancy Steeves to the leadership of the United Church and Toronto Conference is attached to this affidavit as **Exhibit "D"**.

27. I swear this affidavit for the purpose of the Reverend Gretta Vosper's appeal of the Ruling of Nora Sanders, The General Secretary of the General Council of the United Church of Canada, dated May 5, 2015 and for no other or improper purpose.

SWORN BEFORE ME at )  
The City of Toronto, in the )  
Province of Ontario, this )  
30<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2015. )



A Commissioner, etc.

  
Randy Bowes

Randy Bowes



10/27/2015

4mail! - my sermon on original sin



Gretta Vosper

## my sermon on original sin

To: Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

Sun, Jul 26, 2015 at 10:46 PM

Gretta, I am so pleased. I have to tell you that you are one in our church that I admire and am interested in your views on Christianity—and more importantly what role religions and Christianity can play in the future of our dear planet. I did sign up for your blog—but if for some reason I am not listed, please add me. Something for me to look forward to.

So attached is what I presented to our Grosvenor congregation back a while ago. As I mentioned is this topic something that the Observer would be interested in including in one of their editions. I am asking for your opinion. But first, I did not do sufficient research to determine where the UCC stands on the issue of original sin.

I look forward to your comments, critique and advice.

Thank you.

This is Exhibit A  
affidavit of Handy Bowers  
seen before me, this 30th  
October  
2015  
  
A COMMISSIONER FOR TAKING AFFIDAVITS

Professor Emeritus, University of Saskatchewan

From: [REDACTED]  
Sent: Sunday, July 26, 2015 6:52 PM  
To: [REDACTED]

Email - my seminar on original sin  
10/27/2015

**Subject:** Re: my sermon on original sin

[Quoted text hidden]

GPU C Reflections on Original Sin June 28.docx  
168K

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=nae8725ge&view=p&q=qin%3D&ai=bg&namell=bg&searchaction=qwry&mq=14ed76ed&t=g&sm=1&cl=67&ed=45>



Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

## Without the god called God

To: [REDACTED]

Wed, Aug 5, 2015 at 5:35 PM

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: Without the god called God

### Message Body:

Today I read a Globe and Mail article about you and was intrigued by the situation you find yourself in. I'm a Religious Studies phd student at McMaster University who relates, in some ways, to your position (or at least what I take to be your position). I decided to look you up and found this website.

When I read the marquee at the top of the page I was struck by its similarity to something said by Paul Tillich:

"I have written of the God above the God of theism... It takes seriously the radical doubt experienced by many people... [yet] gives one the courage of self-affirmation... [even as] the God of both religious and theological language disappears. But something remains, namely, the seriousness of that doubt in which meaning within meaninglessness is affirmed. The source of this affirmation of meaning within meaninglessness, of certitude without doubt, is not the God of traditional theism, but the 'God above God', the power of being, which works through those who have no name for it, not even the name God."

Earlier he wrote one should think of God something like:

"the depth of your life, the source of your being, your ultimate concern, what you take seriously without any reservation. Perhaps in order to do so, you must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even the word itself."

From what I gather you're an atheist. But it is one thing not to believe in the "traditional" god of the Church (a personal being who intercedes in the world and history), and another to believe in God as Being, or Love, Energy, or something else. If you come down on the side of "without the god called God", is there for you nevertheless some god/God who remains? Or do you go all the way and reject all replacements?

Depending on your answer (or perhaps not), why do you feel it's important to maintain a relationship with, or identify with the United Church? If I could bold or italicize "Church" I would here. Why not simply start something new and be done with both the old god and his names, as well as the old titles and designations for his self-identifying community and leave it behind like a dried out chrysalis?

Why, in other words, be a "post-Christian church" instead of just a community of the just and compassionate etc?

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper [grettavosper.ca](http://grettavosper.ca)

10/27/2015

Gmail - Atheist



## Atheist

To: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Atheist

Message Body.

So very glad to know that there is such a person as a atheist minister.  
I wish that I could attend your sermons. If you are ever in the Guelph area I would love to speak with you or hear your sermon.  
My partner & I do not believe there is such a thing as god.  
Please keep up the good work.

Sincerely bonnie fries

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on [Grettavosper.ca](http://grettavosper.ca)

Wed, Aug 12, 2015 at 12:26 PM

Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]



Gretta Vosper

## Why?

Mon, Aug 17, 2015 at 11:14 PM

To: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Why?

Message Body:

My mother of 12 children reminded her family that "Wisdom is knowing what to say and when not to say it." Well, like most children, sometimes I listened to my mother and sometimes I didn't. So, here I am!  
Greetings from Union, Ontario? I am 65 years young. I have been a retired United Church Minister since 2009. In keeping with my Newfoundland tradition, "By the time we have money to burn, the fire has gone out." Thankfully, even though I am retired, I continued to ask open and honest questions.

In listening to a recent interview on CBC Radio, if I am correct in what I heard, I believe you shared with your audience, in response to a question by the interviewer, that "I would eliminate religion in the world." My open and honest question: If the United Church of Canada is a religious institution, why is your church named West Hill United Church?  
In truth, while I appreciated the interview, and the wisdom you shared, I found your answers less than genuine. Sorry!

All the best!

Many thanks!

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca

10/27/2015

Gmail - current controversy in the UCC



Gretta Vosper

## current controversy in the UCC

Mon, Aug 17, 2015 at 2:40 PM

To: [REDACTED]  
From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: current controversy in the UCC

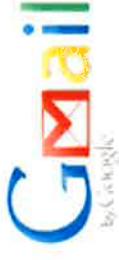
### Message Body:

I am interested in exploring the issues that were first raised by With or Without God which I reviewed for The Montreal Anglican in June 2008. I read John Robinson's Honest to God when it was first published in 1962 and have since read several books by John Shelby Spong, Also Don Cupitt and the Sea of Faith network. Personally I incline more to apophatic or negative theology in the tradition of Meister Eckhart.

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This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca

10/27/2015

Email - Supporting your take on things.



## Supporting your take on things.

Sun, Sep 13, 2015 at 7:25 PM

Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

To: [REDACTED]  
From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Supporting your take on things.

Message Body:

Keep up the good work with what you've practiced. Pretty hard to ignore this God-god-thing and the justification for so many misdeeds. Often leads to inflated egos as often as note :-). Of course I suffer from this but have been disabused of it.

Take care and good luck.

[REDACTED]

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This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca



Erin Vosper

## Review of Gretta's theology and ministry.

Reply-To:

To:

Cc:

Dear David:

I add my voice to others questioning the process in which Gretta seems to be caught. Though i am admittedly not active in the courts of the UCC beyond the congregation, I have questions.

I wonder from your description of it which I have read if there has been any consultation between the conference with her and the congregation? Has she been invited to give her points of view and benefits of her experience? Knowing you, I trust that there have.

So much of GC42 and the csonultaion for 2 years leading up to it produced a call for new ways and forms and expressions of ministry.

Gretta represents in my view a leading edge of ministry)both in theology and practise. (we even have a national program called "Edge")

I believe she represents one direction which may enable many (especially youth) to maintain their personal faith and sense of community in faith.

Please do what you can within the given procedures (that you seem to be caught in?), to modify this process, to reconcile rather than unravel our fabric of faith and community. and to initiate more informal 'person-friendly'- ways of exploring it, and leading us to appreciation of what she has offered faithfully and openly for many years.

For example , perhaps a first nations or restorative type of process might better our achieve our goals of openness , inclusion, as well as truth and effectiveness?

Faternally

10/27/2015

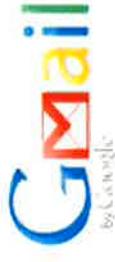
4mail - Review of Gretta's theory and ministry.

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=ace87239&view=pt&q=review%20of%20gretta%27s%20dim%20kirkwood&search\\_query=empty%20folders%20and%20dust%20in%20inbox](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=ace87239&view=pt&q=review%20of%20gretta%27s%20dim%20kirkwood&search_query=empty%20folders%20and%20dust%20in%20inbox)

2/2

10/27/2015

Gmail - [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "Do you really want to risk that?"



Gretta Vosper > [REDACTED]

## [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "Do you really want to risk that?"

Thu, Sep 17, 2015 at 12:13 AM

Reply-to:  
To: [REDACTED]

New comment on your post "Do you really want to risk that?"

Author: Mary [REDACTED]  
E-mail: [REDACTED]

URL:

Comment:

BTW, I am not coming back to this site to read any reply to my post! I have said what I needed to say and I find this whole issue terribly upsetting. There are many other venues for promoting secular humanist and atheist beliefs. There is the Unitarian Church, which I respect. It is enough that all people with all views are welcome to participate in United Church services and social events. I welcome that. Ministers, leaders, that's another thing. A Christian minister should have a bare minimum of Christian beliefs. How can it be otherwise?

You can see all comments on this post here:

<http://www.grettavosper.ca/do-you-really-want-to-risk-that/#comments>

Permalink: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/do-you-really-want-to-risk-that/#comment-4362>

Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4362>

Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4362>



10/27/2015

email - [Gretta Vesper] Comment: "Do you really want to risk that?"

Gretta Vosper

[Gretta Vosper] Comment: "Do you really want to risk that?"

Thu, Sep 17, 2015 at 12:01 AM

amenbeyo@just19.justhost.com

Reply-To:

10

5

New con

Author

E-mail:

: 181

URL: [Comment](#)  
My experience of the United Church has never fit the words you use such as "fundamentalist", "evangelical", "ancient formulas", not when I was a child and teenager in the 1950s and 60s and not now. The UC ministers I know are critical thinkers, liberal minded, and do not preach about a "supernatural, interventionist" God that Greita Vosper claims they believe in. From what I have read of Greita Vosper's thinking (very little, because I found it reductive and based on false dichotomies and I was not inspired to read any more), I find her views shallow and concerning, and I would support a review. There is nothing original or profound about saying it's more important how you live than what you believe. Everyone knows that. It doesn't mean you just dismiss, in a condescending manner, the Bible, the Lord's Prayer, and references to Jesus. What about parables? The power of metaphor? The historical accuracy of some parts of the Bible (not all)?

You can see all comments on this post here:

<http://www.strathavon.com>

Permalink: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/do-you-really-want-to-risk-that#comment-4361>  
Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4361>  
Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4361>



God

To: Gretta Vosper  
[REDACTED]

Hi Ms. Vosper,

as a physicist I do not believe in the existence of anything supernatural. Neither do I believe in afterlife. So I am a plain unbeliever in your sense, and I do agree that "that feeling of consolation or reenergized commitment that one experiences while praying is a completely natural response that is neurological rather than supernatural".

But it is the same feeling I had in childhood and early youth when I grew up in a pious surrounding and was a convinced believer. So the experience of God I had in those earlier times was actually also neurological. And the same holds for all other believers.

My explanation is that we have acquired this neurological ability during Darwinian evolution. It is kind of a built-in psychic force which motivates us to care for our fellow humans, to support them and help them, even if it is not in our direct interest. Because it ensured the survival of the group we were part of, on the whole. Even bacteria cooperate, I learned recently.

Don't you enjoy helping someone? For me that's a kick of the reward system in my brain, an internal discharge of opiodes. So I am in a way selfish while helping others! But nature has made us this way so that goodness comes "directly out of our hearts" without even much thinking.

So either supernatural or neurological, that's only theory. But the phenomenon in itself is important for us. Having realized this I pray a Lord's prayer every morning, many short prayers during the day, when there is a difficult situation and "he" helps me to find the right answer. And I go often to church, particularly if there is a liberal pastor, (I happen to be protestant) and I go even to holy supper, because it helps me to "reenergize commitment" as you said. So I feel like I did as a child, knowing that god is not anywhere outside, but deeply inside the unconscious part of my brain.

How do you judge this? Am I a believer or a nonbeliever? I call myself an atheistic believer. And I think this is the only possible way of believing which is compatible with science, theodizee and all that.

10/27/2015

Gmail - Good

I don't have accounts at facebook, twitter or anything. Is that necessary to join your blog? If not, I would like to join indeed.

Best regards,

<http://einrichtungen.physik.tu-muenchen.de/E10\Welcome.htm>

10/27/2015

gmail - new physics



## new physics

To: Greta Vosper  
[REDACTED]

Sat, Sep 19, 2015 at 9:55 PM

Hi again Greta—I am not sure what you mean by agency but if you mean some sort of God expressing consciousness, that is not what Goswami believes. Greta the reason I have contacted you is because you have become quite visible amongst some of the congregation of the United church in our town, and many here do not believe in the big guy in the sky. I had to reach out to see where you were coming from and recently my cousin gave me your book With or without God. I now see where you are coming from. I believe with Spong that you are a breath of fresh air and what you say is very true and If the Church does not come to its senses it may well self destruct. I will definitely pass on your philosophy to our coffee group and as many of our church that will listen. I am very impressed Greta and I hope to be in further contact with you.  
ps---new computer so please forgive the errors in my English. I am not very good at typing at the best of times.

Best personal regards,

Jack

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 10, 2015 5:35 IPM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: new physics

[Quoted text hidden]

10/27/2015

Gmail - A virtual high five



## A virtual high five

Tue, Sep 22, 2015 at 10:38 AM

To: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: A virtual high five

### Message Body:

Hello,

This will not be a well thought-out email, but I wanted to send it off quickly before I convinced myself it was a silly idea. I just read your bio from the Common Ground Conference site and was just so excited. Excited that you exist, excited that you are doing the things you are doing and how you are doing them. Let me add my voice to those who support you, to those who sometimes feel lost in a world of black and white spiritual ideas. It inspires so much hope to see someone taking bold steps to bring people together. I commend the risk you took in being honest with your congregation and wish you all good things as you bridge these uncharted waters. High fives to you!

Sincerely,

Jessica Worley  
-atheist, former Christian, someone who believes people are more alike than they are different. :)

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on [Gretta Vosper](http://grettavosper.ca).

Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

10/27/2015



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Dear Gretta

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I have been thinking of you and am appalled that we still live in a Medieval era that such a situation may still exist.

With love, care and concern and thank you for your strength.

Our meeting, Questers Leeds, remembers you at the end of each meeting.

Diana Sutherland (Leeds, Yorkshire, England)

Sent from Windows Mail

Tue, Sep 22, 2015 at 4:13 PM

Gretta Vosper

gmail - dear gretta

10/27/2015

4mail - Fwd: Fw: United Church of Canada "review" of Gretta Vosper's ministry



Gretta Vosper <[REDACTED]>

## Fwd: Fw: United Church of Canada "review" of Gretta Vosper's ministry

**Friends of Gretta Vosper**  
To: Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

I don't think this was forwarded to you, either...

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]  
Date: Tue, Sep 22, 2015 at 2:29 PM  
Subject: Fw: United Church of Canada "review" of Gretta Vosper's ministry  
To: [REDACTED]

Hello,

Here is the final e-mail I sent to the upper echelons of UCC.



"No amount of belief makes something a fact." James Randi

On Tuesday, September 22, 2015 2:21 PM, [REDACTED] wrote:

To:  
The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell, Moderator, UCC  
Nora Sanders, General Secretary, UCC  
The Reverend Bryan Ransom, President - UCC Toronto Conference  
David Allen, Executive Secretary - UCC Toronto Conference

Please find attached a letter in support of Gretta Vosper's ministry and what she is trying to accomplish.  
The United Church of Canada would be wise to *radically* change your paradigm and to keep her as a minister.  
Fostering fellowship, understanding, compassion, friendship and love between people is the most important thing; that is what Gretta is doing. *What we believe is not important*. It is our actions towards striving to the accomplishment of the above that count.

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=laed7239&view=tlist#inbox/search%253dfrom\\_gretta.vosper%2526q%253d714f7845983fd795](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=laed7239&view=tlist#inbox/search%253dfrom_gretta.vosper%2526q%253d714f7845983fd795)

10/17/2015

4mail - Find: Fw: United Church of Canada "review" of Gretta Vosper's ministry

Dogma only stands in the way and for that reason churches are emptying of congregants and closing down. Dogma has long ago stopped fulfilling the needs of most people. Likewise, requiring blind belief drives people away from churches. This is the 21st century after all. We are not still in the dark ages. People are applying critical and rational thinking more and more in guiding their behaviour.

Why doesn't the United Church have the courage to transform its thinking and preach *only* provable facts? You can still have tax exempt status by applying for tax-exempt status under the Charitable Corporations Act with the CRA on the basis of "providing community education".

If you don't have the courage to do that, you could at least open the field of acceptability of different types of ministries subsumed under the UCC umbrella.

Sincerely,



"No amount of belief makes something a fact." James Randi

The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell

Moderator, UCC  
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300

Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

or email: [The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell](#)

Nora Sanders

General Secretary, UCC  
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300  
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4 Canada

or email: [Nora Sanders](#)

David Allen

Executive Secretary - Toronto Conference  
65 Mayall Avenue, Toronto, ON M3L 1E7  
or email: [David Allen](#)

The Reverend Bryan Ransom  
President - Toronto Conference  
65 Mayall Avenue, Toronto, ON M3L 1E7

10/27/2015

Gmail - Find: Fw: United Church of Canada "review" of Gretta Vosper's ministry

or email: The Reverend Bryan Ransom

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 **GrettaVosper.doc**  
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10/27/2015

4mail - reading one of your books



by Gretta Vosper

## reading one of your books

To: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: reading one of your books

### Message Body:

I am starting on your "With or Without God." What comes to me most is your sense that God and Jesus are either constructions or metaphors that we can either accept or reject as useful for us. That the Bible is humanly made to persuade ourselves that we can indeed be saved by a divine being, who intervenes on our behalf. Almost, that Christianity is a bad fairy tale that thwarts our hope to be spared the agonies of life.

For me, Jesus becomes, at the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the linkage between us and God. He becomes the man-god once baptized at the Jordan River, and what you call His "eternal sacrifice" is actually His transcendence toward the divine. You see, no one doubts Jesus existed and no one doubts He was crucified. Assuming you have seen the Shroud of Turin and know that it is not either a forgery or an artistic depiction (which it is not), then there is the question: since we know the figure's blood type (AB -- universal donor), if this is not Jesus, then who is it?

I sent you an email last month when I first heard of you that you had perhaps thrown out the baby and kept only the bathwater, but I will try to finish your book.

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on [Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca](http://grettavosper.ca)

10 / 27 / 2015

Gmail - Saving Hi



Saying Hi

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From: [REDACTED]

Message Body:  
Hi Gretta,

I listened to your conversation with Seth Andrews today and I just wanted to say how inspiring I found it to be. I have been an atheist all my life but I greatly admire those who find atheism from within a religious belief system. I am also extremely impressed with the journey that you, and your congregation have taken thus far; it will not have been an easy road I am sure.

On hearing that you often take your 'sermons' from many differing sources I have included a link to a blog I wrote about Taking Responsibility. I wrote this for my two boys and gave it to them when they came of age some years ago. It is something that I believe in passionately and would be greatly honoured if you found it suitable to read to your congregation one day.

Please let me know if the link fails to work

I wish you all the best in your continued journey

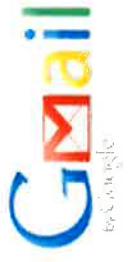
Kind regards

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This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper drettavosper.ca

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10/27/2015



letters

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here is Ingrid's letter.

ttfn

September 27, 2015

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I am not an expert in church law or religion. I only know what I believe and do not believe. I attend West Hill United for the sense of community and for the mental and moral challenges that are presented each week. Meeting the challenges is my own responsibility as a caring human, not because another power says it must be so.

## How did I get to West Hill?

10/27/2015

Gmail - letters

I was not raised in a religious home, but attended a small variety of "Christian" churches over the years.

I always felt like a second class citizen because, not being baptised, I didn't take communion. Also, even at that time, I felt uncomfortable saying the Nicene Creed, because I felt I was being untruthful, and The Lord's Prayer because I expected God to be more forgiving than I could be. Did I need to be forgiven for the good fortune of my birth into a family who sought a peaceful land, and worked hard to achieve a comfortable life? Would forgiveness help the less fortunate? If I was being too literal, why should I have to work so hard to understand the deeper meaning? Why could I not simply speak about the deeper meaning directly? Eventually, I realized that church was not helping me, so I stopped going for 40 years.

Then we read about Gretta Vosper.

A church where people can go believing, not believing, questioning. Where they can be challenged with the moral dilemmas of today, help each other, commit to helping in the community and further afield. Couples can feel comfortable if one is a believer and the other an atheist, or agnostic. Both partners can think and worship in peace, not concerned about judgement by others as to their beliefs. Do we worship? What does that really mean? Expressing deep consideration for humanity, expressing joy in the beauty of the world, overtly recognizing paths to peace. Do we pray? We share the expression of hope. We sing our joys and our sorrows. Greta has worked hard over her years at West Hill United to establish a personal relationship of trust and respect with her congregation, and drawn many new people, like myself, to explore new ideas and commitments.

It has amazed me how many people have discovered West Hill United from reading about the current turmoil in media. They are relieved and excited to finally find a church and a minister that meets their needs!

Is this not the next step for the United Church, to grow its congregation of morally committed members, who move towards opening their minds, accepting new ideas and making room for peace in the world?

Be proud of Gretta for taking the United Church to new levels! We are.

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10/27/2015

gmail - letters

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10/27/2015

Gmail - Short note to the leadership



Gretta Vosper

## Short note to the leadership.

1 message

To: Gretta Vosper  
[REDACTED]

Ingrid has one also.

I'll try to find and send it.

We're off to Vancouver and Edmonton. Thanksgiving with the little people (grandchildren).

We used to say "keep the faith". I hope we can still. Faith is in the beholder, n'est-ce pas?



David Allen

Executive Secretary - Toronto Conference

65 Mayall Avenue, Toronto, ON M3L 1E7

Sept. 28, 2015

Re: Gretta Vosper

Sun, Sep 27, 2015 at 10:01 AM

10/27/2015

*Email - Short note to the leadership.*

Out of the closet, into the fire. How many people have found themselves in my position? I know I am not alone. Coming from the closet, frequently a comforting place to be, into main stream society and articulating a contrary viewpoint is lonely, scary and intimidating.

Gretta did it. So have a number of us, West Hill UNITED parishioners. Does the United Church really stand for inclusion? Does the leadership know what the people are looking for in the way of guidance and understanding?

Gretta does. She meets us in our places. I was baptized in the Anglican Church at the age of 10. We were a growing parish and in need of alter boys etc. Memorizing commandments and creeds was simple enough, just like real school. I loved my mother and father and they went to church. Ergo, they go, I go. No questions asked. Age came. University came and went. Marriage, mortgage, children, now grandchildren...very little in the way of intervention by an all knowing deity was made manifest unto me. I think.

We, humans, have devised ways to heal many of our scourges. However, one of most damning of them all, unbridled faith in a single deity, continues to cause us to be at each others throats. It does not seem to matter from what direction one comes toward this idea, there is no allowing others to approach from another. My way or the h.....y.

In our congregation we have many different paths to what we want to achieve. There are theists, atheists, skeptics, agnostics, wonderers and wanderers. Gretta meets us all with the warmth and conviction that we all have a place. Our mission is to pursue justice for all, to live fully, to care deeply,

to make a positive difference.

The Roman Catholic Church, strangley , may be leading in this. Timothy Radcliffe, leader of the Dominican Order of Friars is helping to understand the directions of Pope Francis. "We have to start where people are at, and find a way for them to belong. ....people who have broken the Church's teaching are part of our flock and we must find ways to tend them." (Macleans, Sept. 28/15, pg.35)

10/27/2015

Gmail - Short note to the leadership.

"The church, Radcliffe, sums up, must go where the people are." Ibid

Gretta is leading a post theistic move that takes the best of the teachings of Christ and marries them with compassion and understanding based on the new paradigm gifted us by science and critical thinking. We can enjoy our lives as we find them. They do not need to be constrained by dogma.

Gretta tends her flock. We have only sprouted a different set of wings. How many other churches are growing? Something is right.



10/27/2015

Gmail - Fwd: supporting the work of Gretta Vosper



Gretta Vosper

## Fwd: supporting the work of Gretta Vosper

1 message

Friends of Gretta Vosper

To: Gretta Vosper

FYI  
Deb

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]  
Date: Sun, Sep 27, 2015 at 9:12 PM  
Subject: supporting the work of Gretta Vosper  
[REDACTED]

Dear David Allen - I wish to enforce the importance of Gretta remaining as our Minister at West Hill United Church. She has been a major inspiration to me in expressing life values which keeps me fully in the moment when I spend time with family and friends. I am 75 years old and have been a member of this church since 1972. Dr. McKay christened our first born son, Kevin that year. I have steadily seen change toward more liberal teachings and Gretta has provided a clear view of her values... our weekly prayer starts off "As I live every day I want to be a channel for peace, may I bring love where there is hatred; healing where there is hurt", etc. etc. This prayer is my guide to good living. Gretta is my rock. May she remain in my church.

10/27/2015

4mail - [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."



Orkney Island

Gretta Vosper

## [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."

Fri, Oct 2, 2015 at 10:40 AM

Reply-to:  
To:

New comment on your post "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."

URL:

Comment:

"What is killing the United Church is that it has, for the entire course of its history, not spoken frankly from the pulpit about what it has offered its clergy in their preparation for ministry particularly in the area of biblical study...." Amen, Gretta!

Post WWII, when increasing proportions of 60's young people received more education, along with massive developments in mass media, new science and adventures in outer space, there was no UCC leadership re-defining "faith", to make it credible. We're the generation who left in droves, alas.

I think of the 60's as the tipping point.

You can see all comments on this post here:

<http://www.grettavosper.ca/you-want-dialogue/#comments>

Permalink: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/you-want-dialogue/#comment-4369>

Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4369>

Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4369>

10/27/2015

Gmail - [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "Call your church back from this precipice."



Gretta Vosper

## [Gretta Vosper] Comment: ""Call your church back from this precipice."""

Sat, Oct 3, 2015 at 11:47 PM

Reply-To:  
To:

New comment on your post ""Call your church back from this precipice."

Author:  
E-mail:  
URL:

Comment:

Excellent article John Spong I like your clarity and plain language. I am tired of us spinning our wheels and pretending nothing is wrong by not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, let alone challenge some thinking. The United church is at crossroad if it could only see it. It can be a great force for good in its calling or simply fade into whimpering oblivion . I am opting for the progressive way Thank you John Spong Gretta Vosper Chris New Nancy Steeves and many others who have the courage of their convictions Richard McKelvie

You can see all comments on this post here:

<http://www.grettavosper.ca/call-your-church-back-from-this-precipice/#comments>

Permalink: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/call-your-church-back-from-this-precipice/#comment-4375>

Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4375>

Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4375>



## Foundations Of Belief

Sat, Oct 3, 2015 at 10:11 PM

Gretta Vosper

Tc: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Foundations Of Belief

Message Body:

Gretta,

I heard the Seth Andrews podcast featuring you. I went online to discover more. I discovered that West Hill, and you both declare:

"How you live is more important than what you believe."

I think that this is inappropriate. More appropriate would be:

"How you live is just as important as what you believe.

I have discovered that you believe that life on Earth, the survival of life on earth, and the ongoing evolution and success of life on Earth are things that all people should understand, participate in, and help to foster.

You didn't say this, I did, but I see it as being in essential agreement with what you have said and published online.

And, stated this way, "what you believe" becomes just as important as "how you live".

The Theist churches of UCC have their belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I would like to see Atheist churches of UCC gain official acceptance and credibility using a declaration of belief in life, especially human life.

People who are considering membership in any UCC church would appreciate guidance from UCC as to which churches are theist, or atheist. And, a strong, unambiguous statement of fundamental beliefs would be helpful in making their choice.

[REDACTED]

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca

10/27/2015



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Sat Oct 3 2015 at 3:07 AM

From:

**Message Body:**  
Hello Gretta,

Since meeting you in Oxford you have often been in my thoughts and especially since your latest troubles caused by what seem to me to be rather arrogant bigots. But like the authorities of Jesus' time they think they are defending 'The Faith' and their god.

I am retiring at the end of November as my wife is very ill. I expect she'll make a recovery but it will be a long haul.

Assuring you of my friendship and concern.  
Much love,

This mail is sent via contact form on [Gretta Vosner](#) [drettavosner.ca](#)



10/27/2015

Gmail - Role Peck comment my response

**comment my response**

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I have long admired Bishop Spong. I have read many of his books and respect the courage he has shown throughout his life in standing up for what he believes is right.

I have admired Gretta Vosper in the past for her courage in speaking up for what she believes is right as well as for the creativity of her services and the

**Full disclosure:** I am one of many former members of West Hill United Church who left that congregation because of our chagrin at the way Gretta and her supporters incrementally removed references to Jesus, scripture, the Bible and God from the liturgy of our services.

I am disappointed that Spong so uncritically takes her side. I now consider both Spong and Greta to be insensitive to those with different beliefs than their own. In their comments and in Greta's actions I feel they are just as dogmatic as any of the people they criticise.

Like Bishop Spong I was also present when Grenia Was installed to head the Cahadah Council of Progressive Christianity. I recall her saying that she and West Hill United Church felt the U.S. Council of Progressive Christianity was not radical enough in rejecting many traditional Christian beliefs. She was and is entitled to say whatever she wants on that subject but I well recall thinking at that time that she had no right to speak on behalf of West Hill United Church in making such a categorical statement

In the intervening years much has changed. As a result of her actions and those of her supporters I estimate that more than half of West Hill's congregation has left. Some have gone to neighbouring churches. Some have been so hurt by her actions that they no longer go to church. Those remaining may well support her but, in my opinion, they and she abandoned many other members of their congregation and made them feel their church had been taken from them.

Bishon Strong saves

"I have admired her as she sought to move Christianity into the future, not in some ivy-towered part of academia, where things that she says are so well accepted as not to be controversial, but in a congregation of real people, who are trying to make sense out of their Christian faith without twisting their 21st century minds into 1st century pretzels. For engaging in this creative effort, which the whole church will sooner or later be required to do, some elements of the United Church of Canada now want to banish her from the ministry of your church. I presume that they want to be allowed to remain comfortably in their pre-modern mentalities. If the United Church of Canada is not broad enough to embrace this creative and unique pastor then this church that I once admired so much has sounded its own death knell. Gretta's "sin," if one can use that word, is that she has dared to share with her congregation the scholarship available in the great academic centers of Christian learning throughout the world."

With respect, Bishop Spong, there are many people in the United Church, both supporters and non-supporters of Gretta's views, who are trying to make sense out of their Christian faith without twisting their 21st century minds into 1st century pretzels. That does not mean that we support all of her conclusions or all of her methods. You seem to presume that unless we do, we are 2,000 years behind the times. I find that insulting.

Cinthic Brodner

**Cynthia Beaurain** Well said and respected. No one can comment with integrity except from within a situation and then it is still biased. I am biased and admit it. I will also admit that I respect any faith statement Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Athiest but do not hold the speaker to court task in their faith. When ppl left WH there where a plethora of options where does one go in the UCC if churches of alternative thinking are silenced? Just this week I understand there were

10/27/2015

4mail - Role Peck comment my response

over 80 I'm attendance at WH so if Greta has it so wrong where woul these folks go to be fed in the UCC. Many are quick to send those folks to other denominations but as you have noted some hurt ones go no where. Greta would likely be the first to humbly say she has made mistakes should anyone lovingly ask her instead of judging and accusing.  
LikeMore .

From: [REDACTED]  
Date: Sat, 3 Oct 2015 11:07:57 -0400  
Subject: Re: please correct me if I speak out of turn re: YOU  
To: [REDACTED]

Hi Cynthia,

Ask for some hard quotes about me questioning my colleagues integrity because I usually lace that with the impossibility of their contexts and with the denominations lack of support for those who wish to speak out - as evidenced by this process. I'm totally willing to apologize if I have been inappropriate, but I'm pretty clear that this is an institutional and contextual problem and that I am fortunate to have a congregation that gave me the leeway to explore my theological education with them.

I'll look for the segments of With or Without God that say that stuff.

g

On Sat, Oct 3, 2015 at 9:02 AM, Cynthia Breadner [REDACTED] wrote:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Well.... then here becomes the issue that we should be about... if Spong and others like him were to pay attention to the grass roots like me at the others who are just interested in following the current of the Spirit, then there would be a whole less acrimony.... when that subsides, I think you'll find that nobody that matters perceives Greta as threat.... the public lynchings.... another story.

Like · Reply · 1 · 21 hrs · Edited

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Adding to [REDACTED]'s post, I keep hearing Vosper and her supporters making claims about what I and other United Church ministers believe and drawing conclusions about our integrity. I suggest that Vosper and these others don't know us very well and have constructed a straw man of us.

Vosper began the rhetoric of questioning her colleagues' integrity. Why should she be immune in a game of her creation?

Like · Reply · 6 hrs

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=need239&view=pt&q=info%40epadev1\[REDACTED\]&fs=1\[REDACTED\]&t=1\[REDACTED\]&lf=1\[REDACTED\]&ts=1\[REDACTED\]](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=need239&view=pt&q=info%40epadev1[REDACTED]&fs=1[REDACTED]&t=1[REDACTED]&lf=1[REDACTED]&ts=1[REDACTED])

[REDACTED] not sure if you remember me as a student but I was in your class a few years ago in London. You were a turning point for me as I was moving my way through my life's discernment which was tangled, and still is tangled, with discernment for ministry. I respect your view of Gretta questioning her colleagues' integrity but in a different way. I see her questions as in free yourself, those who are hiding behind doctrine or dogma and don't believe, and chose to be the first to say it from the pulpit in black and white and let the congregation decide. If she had spoke out 10 years or more ago to the West Hill congregation, and they had accepted her resignation, then this whole discussion would be moot. But the evidence is there are those who feel they are the fabric of the UCC on a wide girth. I believe the tragedy here is that Gretta's voice is misunderstood as attacking when I believe she is lovingly trying to pave a way for people to be real and authentic. I know I certainly couldn't speak authentically if I had not had Gretta say it first and give me courage. I have never labeled myself and choose not to but that is the interesting part of all this, even with no label, by association I have been rejected in places that are the core of, what I feel is optimally, the church.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Let's keep the conversation going!  
Click on the icons below to connect with me online!



10/27/2015

Gmail - I'm a "subject" of Sweden!



## I'm a "subject" of Sweden!

To: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear Gretta,

Thanks for Your quick respons. Just recently a minister (assistant vicar) in the Swedish Lutheran Church wrote a column in a daily newspaper (GöteborgsPosten) in Gothenburg, "Now we must step forward" was the head line. He made references to the present refugee crisis in Europe and also remembers another crisis in Gothenburg many years ago when 63 teenagers, mostly muslims, lost their lives in a fire. He wrote in reference to the fire (my translation): "We also then understood that children die and that people are people and we must reach out to each other. We understood that sorrow and despair have no religious boundaries. I understood that God is no supernatural being who protects us from danger, but emerges in that unwavering MAYBE that carries us through the precarious world."

Some of us still use the word God, some don't.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Skickades från E-post för Windows 10

10/27/2015

gmail - I'm a "subject" of Sweden!

**Från:** greta  
**Skickat:** den 5 oktober 2015 16:03  
**Till:** [REDACTED]  
**Ämne:** Re: I'm a "subject" of Sweden!

[Quoted text hidden]

10/27/2015

4mail - [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."



Gretta Vosper

## [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."

Reply-to: [REDACTED]  
To: [REDACTED]

New comment on your post "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."  
[REDACTED]

URL:

Comment:

Perhaps, but honestly, if Gretta's right, and your right, why does any of this matter? Gretta goes on and on and on, as in this post for thousands of words. In fact, she may be the best wordsmith of all time, but it simply doesn't matter. We're all going to hell in a handbasket regardless and why is it any better to live right than to believe right? Who the hell cares? Eat, drink and be merry makes just as much sense, and I'd argue it makes more sense than live right any day. If, what she believes is true, that there's no God &amp; people are the product of randomness, of chance and chaos, and that their headed for oblivion, we're really all without hope. In the meantime, there's this millisecond of consciousness and it means absolutely nothing.

You can see all comments on this post here:

<http://www.grettavosper.ca/you-want-dialogue/#comments>

Permalink: [http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?comment\\_id=4380](http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?comment_id=4380)

Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4380>

Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4380>

Tue, Oct 6, 2015 at 5:01 PM

10/27/2015

4mail - Support



Gretta Vosper

## Support

To: [REDACTED] >  
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Support

Message Body:

I became aware of your situation after reading Bishop Spong's "Open Letter To the Moderator of the United Church of Canada".

I will do what I can to support you in your ministry.

--  
This mail is sent via contact form on Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca

Tue, Oct 6, 2015 at 5:28 PM

10/27/2015

4mail - REMEMBERING SALEM 1693



4mail

## REMEMBERING SALEM 1693

To:  
Cc:

Wed, Oct 7, 2015 at 11:26 AM

[REDACTED]

I am a proud member of West Hill United Church and indirectly a contributor to the Toronto Conference and the greater United Church of Canada. Recently I have taken offence at the Toronto Conference and the Council Executive stepping outside of the rules of the Church set out by people more thoughtful than them. Now they have created their own rules specifically for one issue surrounding "Gretta Vosper". Do you plan on dunking every minister's head under water until you see that they float or come up and profess they believe in the definition of god that satisfies you or a critical minority? That has been tried. Every minister and member of this church has their own different interpretation or definition of god.

What really galls me is the waste of money that was contributed by all members of this church coast to coast for the purpose of paying lawyers for a cause that could be openly and freely discussed is the paramount of ridiculousness.

I am very dissatisfied with the shoddy recent decisions of The Toronto Conference and The Council Executive and we need to re-examine the rules and regulations that guide them. The United Church of Canada can and should do better things with donated contributions and the obstinance that we see at the executive level of our church is inexcusable.

Hoping for a brighter future,  
[REDACTED]

Gretta Vosper  
[REDACTED]

10/27/2015

Gmail - sympathy



## Sympathy

Wed Oct 7 2015 at 10:13 AM

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Sympathy

## Message Body:

Hi Gretta, I met your friend Nina Lytton yesterday at the MIT Climate Colab Conference in Boston, where we both were at a discussion on how climate change can be discussed with conservative and religious people. After I mentioned that I am a Christian atheist, Nina and I had a good chat, and she sent me the link to your blog. I have read a lot of Jack Spong and also Tom Harpur, but am not otherwise familiar with the religious scene in Canada except for the public scandals.

You have my sincere sympathy and support, since I see the same problems in my own Uniting Church in Australia, which has become brittle and fragile by holding to obsolete myths which fail to resonate with a rational modern culture.

If you don't mind the irony, please accept my prayers that you will lift high the cross. After reading your blog posts last night I wrote a comment today which you might find of interest.

With best wishes

PS - If Matthew 23:27 is any comfort to you, Jesus is at your side against the whitewashed scribes.

This mail is sent via contact form on [Gretta Vosner](#) [gettavosner.ca](#)

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=ace8739d&view=pufq&q=Inbox%26search%26searchSection=unseen&family=1502670442833&tint=1502670442833>

10/27/2015



3

Theism

10

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Theism

**Message Body:**  
Go **Gretta**, nice letter from one of my mentors

This mail is sent via contact form on [Gretta Vosper grettavosper.ca](http://GrettaVosper.grettavosper.ca)

Sat, Oct 10, 2015 at 4:34 PM

Gretta Vosper

Gnosticism - Theism

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/has%20attachment>



## the Elephant in the Essential Agreement Room

To: [REDACTED]

Tue, Oct 13, 2015 at 4:08 PM

Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Wilson,

I hope the General Council Executive decides to begin a review Article 11 in our Basis of Union.

A clear reading of the Article is that Conferences, not Candidates, must define and discern Essential Agreement. Many have simplified it, incorrectly, saying that the Candidate must declare their own Essential Agreement. A review will assist Conference Interview Boards and Candidates. It may also clear up the confusion raised by the three new and distinct additions to our Statement of Doctrine. What do we mean by requiring that Conferences must be satisfied that their Candidate accepts all four as being "in substance agreeable to Biblical teachings?" Using A Song of Faith, for instance, the first question to a Candidate being set apart may well be, "Do you believe in God, Mother, Friend, and Comforter, and do you commit yourself anew to the Holy Mystery?"

For decades our policies have been lowering the traditional "pedestal" on which our clergy once stood – removing many disparities between clergy and laity. For example, as a Commissioner in 1984, I agreed that sexual orientation was not a factor in Church Membership. The corollary decided in 1988 was that it would not be a factor for ordination. Now we have a remit on granting Full Members' privileges to Adherents who have not made a public profession of faith. Will that decision also follow for our clergy? There are currently no particular required responses to the questions we ask in Ministry Celebration services.

The proposal I offered in Hamilton Conference may lead to change, but does not ask for it. I believe that our whole 21<sup>st</sup> century Church wants assurance that the responsibilities of Conferences and the undertakings of Candidates remain faithful to what we intend and believe.

> 30 <

10/27/2015

Email - the Elephant in the Essential Agreement Room

For further information or clarification, please contact me by email at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] re his September 2015 article.

You may also refer to [REDACTED]



Gretta Vosper

**Re: Gretta Vosper**

Mon, Oct 19, 2015 at 12:39 PM

Dear Sharon,

I have passed your message onto to Gretta.

I am sure she will be happy to hear from you.

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]

1

On Sun, Oct 18, 2015 at 1:02 PM, [REDACTED] wrote:  
[REDACTED] here. We of the Spiritual Studies class in the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville FL are reading and discussing Gretta's book With or Without God. We were so sorry to hear that her path has led to a sad confrontation with her church's leadership. We feel that she is indeed one of us and would be happy among us. If you are in touch with her, please give her our best wishes and a big hug.

10/27/2015

4mail - [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."



Gretta Vosper

## [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."

amenbeyo@justhost.com

Reply-To:  
To:

New comment on your post "You want dialogue? We're happy to oblige."

Author:  
E-mail:  
URL:

Comment:

I don't understand the opinions that have been expressed about you Gretta. They would like to say that the only explanation for the support you are getting is that you've mounted an 'orchestrated campaign'.

Just like you, I would like to break this down. But my break-down is a bit simpler and more direct. The United Church of Canada, including all its ministers etc., have just been found guilty of cultural genocide against the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. This cultural genocide is undeniable and furthermore it is a direct result of the doctrines held by the United Church; specifically its brand of Christianity and the zeal with which it has been pursued.

But instead of attempting to make amends -- as you are doing so passionately in your own practice -- they are busy bashing you for questioning the very doctrines that shaped this tragic history. And they want to take your church building away, so it will belong to 'them' again. They owe it and everything else they own morally (if not legally) to the Aboriginal victims of their concerted efforts to kill (sorry -- 'Christianize' -- doesn't that sound wonderful?) the Indian in the child. I find their inability to reflect truly breathtaking, but criminality is often like that, I'm afraid.

Does this sound harsh? Perhaps, but if you think about it from the perspective of the victims, it is no more or less than the simple truth. And simple truth does not require orchestrated campaigns. It gathers slowly, but eventually sweeps all before it.

You can see all comments on this post here:

<http://www.grettavosper.ca/you-want-dialogue/#comments>

Permalink: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/you-want-dialogue/#comment-4391>

Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4391>

Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4391>



Gretta Vosper

## [Gretta Vosper] Comment: "Between Tradition and Altruism"

amenbeyo@just19.justhost.com

Reply-To: [REDACTED]  
To: [REDACTED]

New comment on your post "Between Tradition and Altruism"

Author:

E-mail:

URL:

Comment:

The Cosmic Parent of Life On Earth is the result of my forty year search for God After Science. The death of the literal truth of the Holy Bible and the supernatural is for my path a part of realizing that religious fantasies are all that mankind has had all these centuries in creating law and codes of moral conduct. Brain micro-structures are probably the sources of every major hypnotic category, mysteries beyond the understanding of the average mesmerized layman and the faithful. All of this history of God made today's global civilization possible, even after losing entire cultures and religions. Lost arts always attend human generation gaps, which are more frequent and normal to today's more sterile post-modern cultures, losing the detailed brilliance of many meritorious traditions (perhaps erroneously founded on super-naturalism). We are always losing childhood dear hearts of gold to old age, heroes that cannot be replaced.

The Cosmic Parent of Life On Earth is as much a place in your heart already as an intellectual category that joins mankind's quest to make sense of our place under the stars and the noon day sun. We are each born into our families, nation, place and time of national and international development, with mankind's knowledge now doubling every year or so, when it was first noted doubling between 1950 to 1970, crowned with the moon landings..... God was the first imaginary point of view to see Earthrise: the earth seen rising above the horizon of the moon. Our ironic turn of paradigm shifting here stands in contrast to the two million years of hominid moon gazing. The rise of the global culture that got us here is the one technological/intellectual civilization that also split the atom and discovered DNA, mapping the human genome right down to the future hope of micro-mapping the mind/brain's billions of secrets of comfort and joy surpassing the wildest dreams of ALL cherished holy books, and secular books ever written or lost to fleeting inspirations, including The Lost Chord of all compositions, musical, symphonic, and otherwise. Tears of joy and ecstasy await the brave mind/brain explorer secrets to be discovered and perhaps recorded for posterity, future advanced (non-analog) curriculums, and other direct connections to the best mind/brain maps to enlightenment in future human history.

Communication with animals and training them in rudimentary languages has already begun with Koko, among other apes and perhaps even dolphins, porpoises, whales, elephants, and other gifted animals. We as humans owe it to ourselves to realize that we are already not alone in the universe when we arrogantly overlook the animals of the earth. It is a matter of time and the renaissance of mind/brain technological development, and ensuing cultural outgrowths and innovations.

The needs that drive people to seek nirvana can be deeply and more perfectly explored once bliss is understood and made available to mind/brain explorers. Seeking "God" is promising to be a more certain undertaking with these advances in technology and scientific culture. Creating a tapestry of human genomics as the future global cultural pursuits will allow conquering evil and temptations, secrets and lies as the mind/brain illuminates the highest ethical standards of honesty that the human race could have ever experienced beyond rational hopes.

You can see all comments on this post here:  
<http://www.grettavosper.ca/between-tradition-and-altruism/#comments>

Permalink: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/between-tradition-and-altruism/#comment-4393>

Trash it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=trash&c=4393>

Spam it: <http://www.grettavosper.ca/wp-admin/comment.php?action=spam&c=4393>

10/27/2015

Gmail - Lenses



## Lenses

Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

Sun, Oct 25, 2015 at 11:15 PM

To: Gretta Vosper [REDACTED]

Dear Gretta,

It is always a pleasure for us to have some face time with either you or Scott as we did with both of you today. If it seemed like I was trying to 'rush' Graham through a story, it was not in the least out of a sense of our wanting to leave. It was more out of my desire to afford you some personal space especially after your very cogent, compelling and heartfelt talk today which touches all of us deeply, especially now. It is clear you are for whatever reason currently embroiled in a struggle that challenges your core beliefs and convictions that you did not invite, that came unexpectedly from out in left field and from a source which you care about deeply. Nor has it gone unnoticed how much you care so deeply for us, your flock. I and I am sure most others are touched to our roots watching you face it with courage, confidence, humility, magnanimity and most of all, love. I hold a deep and abiding respect, admiration and wonderment for a person I consider a personal role model who not only talks the talk but walks the hard road with such grace and strength. It is truly a privilege for me to call you my Minister and my friend and for both, I am truly grateful.

Your star shone very brightly today and continues to do so well into this night and beyond ... at least in my sky.

**From:** Gretta Vosper  
**Sent:** Sunday, October 25, 2015 7:04 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Lenses

[Quoted text hidden]

10/27/2015

Gramail - Copy of Letters to NCC concerning upcoming hearing as requested on West Hill site - best wishes!



4

**Copy of Letters to UCC concerning upcoming hearing as requested on West Hill site - best wishes !**

Message

Mon Oct 26 2015 at 12:00 PM

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Copy of Letters to UCC concerning upcoming hearing as requested on West Hill site - best wishes !

Message Body

Dear Bishop Cannwell

Dear Biship Callwell,

I would describe myself as a Progressive Christian and my travelling is hopeful because of people like Gretta, who are not afraid to speak out. She will not be the first or the last. I too have long ceased to want to use the word 'God' because the image and ideas it engenders are so often dangerous

Progressive Christians will always seek to exchange views – calmly: to explore –hopefully; and to embrace change courageously – in order to thrive; but life and love must lead to action for justice and peace, giving the faceless a voice and the ‘hungry’, food. distortions by those who claim it.

There should be no fear, or admonition, or rejection attached to striking out into the wildwoods of challenging what we have always been told is unalterable . We need trailblazers otherwise there would be no advances in any field.

alternative ideas. Anyone who is gagged or ousted for challenging perceived absolutes will join a select company of persecuted men and women down the ages.

I hope the hearing will be quiet, compassionate, full of grace and a place to learn – for everyone.

Copies to: General Sec. Executive Sec. President Toronto Conference and West Hill Church

This mail is sent via contact form on Grotto Vosner [grottovosner.com](http://grottovosner.com)

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/23981947> [need 2 F import-re-learning & re-import of 2 F imported contacts] 1/2

10/27/2015

4mail - Copy of letter to MCC concerning upcoming hearing as requested on West Hill site - best wishes!

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=lace8729&view=p&t=mt&as\\_size=medium&t\\_size=operator\\_size&cat\\_church%2Fimport-re-hearing&as\\_within\\_2m&search\\_adv&tf\\_15DA0&cl=black&bg\\_color=white](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=lace8729&view=p&t=mt&as_size=medium&t_size=operator_size&cat_church%2Fimport-re-hearing&as_within_2m&search_adv&tf_15DA0&cl=black&bg_color=white) 2/2





## **Southminster-Steinhauer United Church**

*An Inclusive, Affirming Congregation exploring an Expansive Christianity*

10740 – 19 Avenue

Edmonton, Alberta T6J 6W9

Phone: (780) 435-2028 Fax: (780) 435-2058

web Site : [www.smsuc.com](http://www.smsuc.com) e-mail: info@smsuc.com

September 29, 2015

The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell, Moderator  
Nora Sanders, General Secretary – United Church of Canada  
David Allen, Executive Secretary - Toronto Conference  
The Reverend Bryan Ransom – President of Toronto Conference  
Westhill United Church

Dear Jordan, Nora, David, Bryan and Friends at Westhill:

### **Re: Review of Rev. Gretta Vosper**

Although you have heard from a number of individuals in this congregational who have expressed their personal concerns with the action of Toronto Conference, the Board has instructed me to write on behalf of the congregation of Southminster-Steinhauer United Church to express our dismay and dissatisfaction with the process Toronto Conference is undertaking with respect to the Rev. Gretta Vosper. To undertake a review is certainly antithetical to the approach we would expect to address differences in doctrine, belief and theology within our denomination.

In a church that values justice, equity and diversity, it is deeply disturbing that a conference would initiate a review of this nature which is not mandated by *The Manual* of the UCC but is based on an opinion given by the General Secretary of the United Church of Canada. While *The Manual* authorizes the General Secretary to rule on “questions about polity, procedures and practices of the United Church,” (E.4.2.3(f)) it is unlikely that this provision contemplated granting powers to an employee of the denomination which would authorize him/her to *design* a process leading to an unprecedented review by a Conference Interview Board of an ordered minister with over 20 years of service. One would expect that this provision was intended to delegate the kind of responsibilities to *interpret* existing polity, procedures and practices where there is some uncertainty or vagueness with regard to such matters. We understand that this review has been instigated in the absence of any complaint from the congregation being served by the ministry personnel in question, without a recent oversight visit to the congregation and minister (which generally precedes most reviews) and without any engagement in dialogue with the ministry personnel in question and the congregation she serves.

It is incongruous with the values we hold as a church for Toronto Conference to be engaging in a process that is deeply flawed and cannot possibly be imagined to meet the standard of procedural fairness under Canadian law. To initiate a disciplinary process in this matter is unfair, misguided and harmful not only to the ministry personnel in question, the congregation most affected but also to the reputation of the United Church of Canada and therefore affects all of us who are members or ministry personnel within the denomination. The theological position which appears

*This is Exhibit.....B.....referred to in the affidavit of.....Randy Bowes.....sworn before me, this.....30<sup>th</sup>.....day of.....October.....20..15.*  
  
A COMMISSIONER FOR TAKING AFFIDAVITS

contemplate that procedural fairness could be deemed to be present in proceedings that commence so many years later.

It may be entirely appropriate (perhaps even decades overdue) for the UCC to address what “essential agreement” means in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and 90 years after the union that created The United Church of Canada. But surely such a question belongs to a process very different than the one that Toronto Conference is undertaking. Surely such a question does not belong within disciplinary proceedings like a review but in study, dialogue and conversation across the church.

We are hopeful that Toronto Conference will immediately discontinue the review and ad hoc process and move toward undertaking further discernment and advice to enable a more appropriate forum and fair process to address the matters that are of concern to you.

Ron Henderson  
Chair of the Board

cc. Rev. Gretta Vosper



This is Exhibit..... referred to in the  
affidavit of..... Hendry Bowes  
sworn before me, this..... 30<sup>th</sup>  
day of..... October ..... 20..... 15  
  
A COMMISSIONER FOR TAKING AFFIDAVITS

### An Open Letter

#### To the Moderator of the United Church of Canada: The Rt. Rev. Jordan Cantwell

Dear Moderator Cantwell,

I write with some alarm at what is happening in the United Church of Canada, a church that I have long admired. I recall your history. Your church decided that women were not to be excluded from ordination long before the first woman ever applied. In 1988 your church proclaimed that homosexual people were not ineligible for ordination. That stand resulted in a loss of members, but your church responded to that loss with a campaign slogan that rang throughout Canada: "Proud to be United." The rest of the Christian world rejoiced to witness your passion for truth. I have come to Canada under the auspices of the United Church of Canada to lecture more times than I can count. These events have been in every province of your nation from the Maritimes to British Columbia, from Nova Scotia to the islands off Vancouver. I have led conferences in each of your UCC conference centers. I have written articles in praise of the United Church of Canada. It was the one Christian body in the world that seemed free of the need to be tied to the past, but was rather courageously open to the future.

Now to my dismay, a segment of the United Church of Canada has decided that it is no longer secure enough or open enough to contain one of its most creative, future-oriented pastors. I refer to the Rev. Gretta Vosper of the West Hill United Church in Toronto.

I have known Gretta for years. I was present when she was installed to head The Progressive Christian Movement in Canada; a movement I helped to found in the United States and that now has chapters in most of the other countries in the English-speaking world. I have encouraged her in her writing career. I wrote the foreword to her first book, *With or Without God*, and I pushed her to write her book on prayer entitled *Amen*.

I have admired her as she sought to move Christianity into the future, not in some ivy-towered part of academia, where things that she says are so well accepted as not to be controversial, but in a congregation of real people, who are trying to make sense out of their Christian faith without twisting their 21<sup>st</sup> century minds into 1st century pretzels. For engaging in this creative effort, which the whole church will sooner or later be required to do, some elements of the United Church of Canada now want to banish her from the ministry of your church. I presume that they want to be allowed to remain comfortably in their pre-modern mentalities. If the United Church of Canada is not broad enough to embrace this creative and unique pastor then this church that I once admired so much has sounded its own death knell. Gretta's "sin," if one can use that word, is that she has dared to share with her congregation the scholarship available in the great academic centers of Christian learning throughout the world.

We Christians are living today on the other side of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo. We understand such things as the vastness of space and the generally accepted 13.8 billion year age of this universe. In such a worldview, there is clearly no theistic God hovering above the sky of a three-tiered universe, ready to intervene in supernatural ways. Does that mean there is no God? Of course not! It does mean, however, that God can no longer be conceived of as a being, supernatural in power, dwelling externally to our world, who is standing by ready to invade human history to answer our prayers or to impose the divine will. It means that our traditional pre-Copernican God language is simply no longer a language we can use. Rethinking God in non-theistic terms is one of the great concerns of contemporary Christian theology. The primary theologian under whom I trained, Paul Tillich, a Reformed theologian out of Germany, made this so clear. Please note that Dr. Tillich was probably the best read Christian theologian in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He died in 1965. His ideas hardly represent new thinking. This means that those who

want to banish Gretta are simply not aware of where Christian theology is today. They do not comprehend the wide gap that exists today between the Christian academy and the Christian pew. Gretta is one of the few pastors willing to live and work on the front lines and she dares to do so while leading a real congregation in which she is both loved and admired. She and her congregation are making an attempt to bridge this gap and to bring relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity. Instead of trying to silence her, your church should be celebrating the fact that you have produced an incredible star.

Gretta has called herself “an atheist minister.” While that language is startling to some, the Christian academy knows exactly what she is saying. To refer to oneself as an “atheist” does not mean that one is asserting that there is no God; it means that the “theistic” definition of God is no longer operative or believable. It has not been operative in intellectual circles since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps if Gretta had called herself a “non-theistic” pastor, people would not respond with the negativity that is born out of such incredible and profound theological ignorance. Gretta’s style, however, is to shock people into opening their minds to new possibilities and thus to call them into a new understanding of God. Under the impact of her ministry one cannot hide in the time-worn platitudes of our religious past. That is exactly what the Christian Church of today needs to hear and the issue with which it needs to wrestle. An “in your face” style is not for everyone, but it is a necessary aspect of ministry that can help awaken an irrelevant and dying church. I assume she must have believed that the United Church of Canada had within its leadership sufficient theological learning that her words would be properly understood. The leaders of this church need to assert loudly that they do, or the Christian world will be left to draw the conclusion that your church is no longer capable of living in the modern world.

The vast numbers of former Christians, who have dropped out of organized religion, have done so as a direct response to the small minds saying unbelievable things that they confront inside so many traditional churches. They are bored by what they experience. Institutional Christianity will die of boredom long before it dies of controversy. Controversy is indeed a sign of life. Gretta uses language that will cause secular people to turn their heads, to say: "Did I hear that right? Surely a Christian pastor cannot be saying what I just heard. Is there something about Christianity that I have missed, something about which I have never thought before? Should I perhaps re-enter church life to listen anew?" Surely you do not want to penalize a pastor whose style has gotten the attention of the audience that now listens to Gretta across not only Canada, but throughout the rest of the Christian world. Those are exactly the people that Christianity must attract if it wishes to avoid its almost relentless journey into medieval irrelevance.

Gretta is also quite correct in calling for the church to abandon its victimizing forms of Christianity. There is no such thing as "original sin" into which we have fallen and from which we have to be saved. That idea is nothing more than a hangover from such 4<sup>th</sup> century thinkers as Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. The concept of "original sin" assumed that there was an original perfection from which we have fallen. It assumes a passive human helplessness from which divine rescue is essential. It assumes that God does not know how to forgive and so God requires a human sacrifice and a blood offering before both divine forgiveness and divine love are possible. It assumes that salvation is achievable only through the invasion of our world by a theistic deity. This is the portrait of the God who decided to punish Jesus for our sins. It is this dated theology that permeates the Christian Church today and it is this theology that Gretta Vosper is challenging. Out of this theology we Christians continue to say strange things like: "Jesus died for my sins." This theology turns God into a monster who

requires a human sacrifice and a blood offering; it turns Jesus into a victim and it turns human beings into guilt-filled creatures, groveling before God and begging for mercy! Besides all of these liabilities we also now know that this theology is simply wrong.

Those of us who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are inevitably post-Darwinian people. We know that there never was an original perfection from which we have fallen. Darwin taught us that at the beginning there was only a slow evolution over billions of years as we journeyed from single cells of life into the status of self-conscious complexity that marks human life today.

If there was no original perfection, then there could not have been a fall from perfection. One cannot fall from that which never existed. If there was no fall then there is no such thing as original sin from which we need to be saved. One cannot be saved from what never was nor can one be “restored” to a status one never possessed. Finally there is no need for a deity, defined theistically, who mounts the rescue operation. So the whole way we tell the Jesus story has got to be rethought and reformulated. To say that publicly, as Gretta does, is not to be a threat to the church, it is to be the hope of the church.

These are the things that the United Church of Canada needs to hear if any part of it wants to remove Gretta Vosper from her ministry. Such a church will look “heroic”, only to an increasingly neurotic band of “true believers,” who think they can protect God from knowledge and it will become the laughing stock of the members of our increasingly secular society, who are quite sure they want nothing to do with the kind of Christianity that you will then represent.

I grieve over the direction in which at least some parts of the United Church of Canada are now walking. I urge you, as the leader of that church, to call your church back from this precipice.

John Shelby Spong





This is Exhibit..... D .....referred to in the  
affidavit of..... Mandy Bowes  
sworn before me, this..... 30<sup>th</sup>  
day of..... October ..... 20.15.  
  
A COMMISSIONER FOR TAKING AFFIDAVITS

October 1, 2015

The Right Reverend Jordan Cantwell, Moderator  
Nora Sanders, General Secretary – United Church of Canada  
David Allen, Executive Secretary – Toronto Conference  
The Reverend Bryan Ransom – President of Toronto Conference  
Westhill United Church

**Re: Proposed Review of the Reverend Gretta Vosper**

I am writing to each of you as one who chose to find spiritual community within the United Church of Canada and one who has been proud to be identified as ministry personnel within the UCC for 17 years of my 34 years of ordered ministry. I was raised in a denomination that excluded me from the vocation of ministry on the basis of my gender. I was ordained in a denomination that sought to exclude me from the vocation of ministry on the basis of my sexual orientation. I was drawn to The United Church of Canada because it has made space for a wide theological spectrum and has been a leader in seeking social, personal and global justice. I am alarmed and ashamed at the actions of my spiritual community in instigating a review which has the potential to exclude a colleague for rooting her spirituality and her ministry in values rather than beliefs.

I have chosen to exercise my vocation within the UCC because of its ethos of valuing critical thought, intellectual rigor, openness, acceptance, diversity, justice and fostering respect for a wide range of political and theological perspectives. I have taken great pride in being part of a big tent that is not staked in the ground of dogma or creed. It seems to me this valued reputation of our denomination that many of us have cherished is at risk by the actions taken by Toronto Conference in this matter on a ruling given by the General Secretary.

Given that Ms. Vosper has publically expressed her nonbelief in a theistic, interventionist, supernatural being called “God” for more than a decade, one is left to speculate about what the particular “concerns” could possibly be that would give rise to a review at this point in time. What motivates a conference to review Ms. Vosper now when her theology and praxis have been a matter of public record since the publication of her first book in 2004? Surely natural justice requires that the complainant specify the concerns so that the accused knows the case to be met. Surely procedural fairness requires a level of transparency and the opportunity for the “accused” to face her “accusers” in a manner that is not evident here. Even if there were an existing process within *The Manual* for such a review, how could procedural fairness be deemed to be present in proceedings that commence 11 years after the theology and praxis (which appear to invoke this action) were published?

It is deeply disturbing to read the request to the General Secretary as framed by the executive of Toronto Conference. On the face of it, it is difficult to discern a genuine and sincere inquiry in that request. The General Secretary appears to have been asked a rhetorical question. The desired answer is entirely implied in the question. The request of Toronto Conference could have simply read: Since there is no apparent basis in our polity to conduct a review on theological grounds (but solely on the basis of the effectiveness of the ministry personnel in his/her context and/or their recognition of the authority of presbytery), kindly outline a process to require an ordered minister to continuously re-affirm the questions asked at his/her ordination/commissioning or admission.

The inquiry which prompts this ruling appears to be lacking in good faith in proceeding to describe the action it wishes to undertake with the authority of the General Secretary.

While *The Manual* clearly authorizes the General Secretary to rule on “questions about polity, procedures and practices of the United Church,” (E.4.2.3(f)) it is difficult to imagine that this provision was intended to empower any single individual to *design* a process that would lead to an unprecedented review. It is inconceivable that a denomination which has designed a complex process of church wide consultation through proposals and remits would delegate the power to construct a process which could lead to the remedial or disciplinary outcomes provided for in J.9.4 of *The Manual* to an individual. Furthermore, this ruling is incongruent with the trend toward conducting standardized reviews under J.9.3 by trained and paid reviewers to empower a Conference Interview Board (not to mention that it is the CIB in Ms. Vosper’s own conference) to undertake an interview that is to be known as a review.

With all due respect to the opinion of the General Secretary, the conclusion that suitability for ordered ministry is synonymous with effectiveness in ministry has laid the foundation for an unfair and flawed process. To initiate what amounts to a disciplinary process in this matter is unjust, misguided and harmful not only to the ministry personnel in question, the congregation most affected but also to the ethos and reputation of the United Church of Canada and therefore affects all of us who are members or ministry personnel within the denomination.

It is my sincere hope that Toronto Conference will abandon this process and offer leadership in beginning a dialogue that would enable the UCC as a denomination to discern what is essential for our identity, faith and our leadership. The “concerns” that may have prompted this process create an important and timely opportunity for our denomination to address our relevance and effectiveness in a culture and context that is very different from the one that birthed the UCC in 1925. It is time to inspire one another to create a spiritual community that truly matters and can make a difference in the world. Were we to do so, there might again be the opportunity to find ourselves the subject of public discussion for our bold acts of justice, our relevant spiritual gatherings and our engaged faith in action rather than whether or not we will exclude each other from exercising our vocation in the UCC for describing ourselves as theists, a-theists or deists.

I celebrate the ministry of Gretta Vosper and have known her to be very effective as ministry personnel not only in her pastoral and prophetic leadership with Westhill United Church but also in creating resources, writing prayers, recasting hymns, blogging, speaking and writing in ways that have served many of us in the UCC and well beyond our denomination. She is a valued colleague and an important voice in The United Church of Canada. I appreciate the leadership of each of you to whom this letter is addressed and am grateful for your passion and diligence in offering your gifts to our denomination. I remain hopeful that a better path will be chosen to address the “concerns” which prompted this “review.” The energy, stress and expense of these proceedings is inappropriate and unwarranted in a situation where there is no breach of ethics or breakdown in pastoral relations which give rise to an unprecedented review. Thank you your consideration of this matter.

Yours Truly,  
Rev. Dr. Nancy Steeves

**REVEREND GRETTA VOSPER**  
Appellant

-and- **THE GENERAL SECRETARY of the GENERAL COUNCIL**  
Respondent

**ONTARIO  
JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL  
COUNCIL  
(The United Church of Canada)**

**REPLY AFFIDAVIT OF RANDY BOWES**  
**(Pursuant to Section 13.7.6 of The United Church of**  
**Canada's Appeals Resource, August 2013)**

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