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## Atheist Minister Continues Fight to Remain Ordained in United Church of Canada

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BY [MICHAEL GRYSOSKI](#), CHRISTIAN POST REPORTER

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(PHOTO: BILL BURDICK)

Gretta Vosper, minister with the United Church of Canada, at an event in Coral Gables, Florida in February 2015.

A minister in the United Church of Canada who is an avowed atheist is fighting to keep her clergy credentials as a regional body investigates the effectiveness of her ministry.

The Reverend Gretta Vosper, head pastor of West Hill United Church in Toronto, has filed an appeal over a ruling in May from Nora Sanders, general secretary for the UCC General Council.

In the Sanders ruling, the general secretary provided the Toronto Conference with a process for reviewing the effectiveness of Vosper's ministry.

"In my opinion, a person who is not suitable for ministry in the United Church cannot be 'effective' as United Church ministry personnel," wrote Sanders in May.

"I understand the Conference has made no decision yet to pursue this process or to take any other action in response to the concerns that are before it. My prayers will be with the Conference throughout its deliberations, and with the ordered minister and all others involved in this matter."

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In emailed comments to The Christian Post, Vosper explained that she and her peers were appealing multiple things pertaining to the process of review.

"We have appealed two things – the ruling by the General Secretary and the motion to review which was made by the Toronto Conference sub-Executive Committee," said Vosper.

"We have received an extension (due to the vacation of the UCC's in house legal counsel) and must submit our arguments regarding the appeal by September 18th."

Vosper came out as an atheist back in 2001. She has called the UCC "probably the most progressive Christian denomination in the world" and wants it to be more welcoming of atheism.

"After I spontaneously preached a sermon in which I completely deconstructed the idea of a god named God, rather than fire me, the congregation chose to step out on an unmarked path," reads the About section of her website.

"With them, I've laboured, lamented, lost, and loved. It's hard road but a worthy one with no finish line in sight. Let's walk this road together. I promise you'll be inspired."

In an earlier interview with CP, Toronto Conference Executive Secretary the Rev. David Allen talked about the process for investigation Vosper's effectiveness.

"A review is a formal process within the United Church which is ordered when serious questions have been raised about a minister's effectiveness," said Rev. Allen.

"In this case, a team of five people will interview Ms. Vosper. They will report to a larger committee of 40 people, and that committee will give its opinion to the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference on whether Ms. Vosper is suitable for ministry within The United Church of Canada."

Allen explained that the review process involves asking Vosper if she still affirms certain questions asked at ordination, "Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself anew to God?" and "Do you believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, and do you accept this call?"

Allen updated CP on Friday as to the current status of the investigation, explaining how the Vosper appeals will be handled.

"There is no official 'decision' against her. The only decision we made was to order the review after we learned what the appropriate process would be," said Allen.

"She appealed the ruling of the General Secretary as well as the decision by the Conference to order a review. Both appeals will be considered in the fall by the General Council's Judicial Committee. It will decide whether to hear the appeals."

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