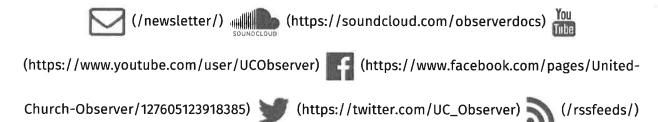
UCOBSERVER

(/)



Atheist minister faces Conference review

Rev. Gretta Vosper, minister of West Hill United in Toronto and a self-declared atheist, faces a church trial on her suitability for ministry in The United Church of Canada. *By Mike Milne*

FAITH | July 2015

Toronto Conference began what it calls a review process this past spring. But because Vosper has appealed a ruling on the process, the review, if it moves forward, is unlikely to take place until autumn.

The review was sparked by informal complaints about Vosper's well-publicized declarations of atheism, plus a formal letter to the Conference from the board of downtown Toronto's Metropolitan United, asking for "clarification of the shared values and beliefs of The United Church of Canada" and expressing concerns about "West Hill United's atheistic/post-theistic beliefs."

Reviews are usually based on a minister's effectiveness; suitability for ministry is normally determined by a Conference interview board before ordination, commissioning or admission and rarely, if ever, revisited. So Toronto Conference's Executive voted to ask General Council general secretary Nora Sanders how to deal with concerns about Vosper, "with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission."

The first of those three questions is, "Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself anew to God?"

The process suggested by Sanders approves asking Vosper those questions again, linking

ministers' suitability for ministry in the United Church with their effectiveness as ministry personnel.

Toronto Conference asked Vosper to respond to the questions in writing by early June and face a five-member commission from Conference's interview board later in the month. Instead of doing that, she appealed the general secretary's ruling. The appeal must be considered by different levels of the General Council's judicial committee before the review sought by the Conference can go ahead.

If Vosper's appeal is denied, Conference could resume its review of her ministry and possibly recommend that she be placed on the church's Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary), which — if confirmed by a formal hearing — would amount to firing her.

Readers' advisory: The discussion below is moderated by The United Church Observer and facilitated by Intense Debate (ID), an online commentary system. The Observer reserves the

right to reject any comment it deems to be inappropriate. Please note: readers do not need to sign up with ID to post their comments on ucobserver.org. We require only your user name and e-mail address. Your comments will be posted from Monday to Friday between 9:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Join the discussion today!

Comment (1) Login Sort by: Date Rating Last Activity



John DiPede · 2 hours ago

0

This article mentions a formal letter from Metropolitan United expressing concerns about "West Hill's atheistic/post-theistic beliefs". In 2004 West Hill first outlined its shared values in a document called "VisionWorks". It has been revisited and revised twice over the past 11 years. Contrary to what Metropolitan UC suggests, the most recent version clearly articulates: "With roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, we embrace theists, agnostics and atheists.

What we share is a reverence for life that moves us to seek truth, live fully, care deeply, pursue justice and make a difference in the world." VisionWorks was developed and revised exclusively by members and adherents. It is a guide as we strive to embrace the core values that we believe are foundational to positive relationships with ourselves, others, all life and our planet. The complete document can be found at:: http://westhillunited.squarespace.com/visionworks... (http://westhillunited.squarespace.com/visionworks-2009/). I would suggest that all who take the time to read it will be hard pressed not to be in "essential agreement".

Reply Report

Enter text right here!		
Comment as a Guest, or l	ogin:	
Name	Email	Website (optional)
Displayed next to your comments.	Not displayed publicly.	If you have a website, link to it here.

Subscribe to None

EDITORIALS

(/editorials/2015/07/standing_values/)

Observations (/editorials/2015/07/standing_values/)

by David Wilson

Standing up for Canadian values





VIDEO



(/video/2014/11/first_world_war/)

ObserverDocs: First World War Centenary (/video/2014/11/first_world_war/)

by Observer Staff

This year marks 100 years since the outbreak of the First World War. And still, the images of film and the words of poets from that era resonate today.

EDITORS' PICKS

MOST POPULAR

RETROSPECT July 2015

Bosnia's invisible war (/retrospect/2015/07/bosnia/)

by Mike Milne

A relief convoy carrying church aid finds determination amid destruction in a forgotten corner of former Yugoslavia — September, 1996

JUSTICE May 2015

Broken dreams in Little Mogadishu (/justice/2015/05/somali/)

by Andrew Livingstone

Canada's Somali community continues to struggle with higher-than-average levels of violence, unemployment and discrimination

SOCIETY March 2015

Beyond Ferguson (/society/2015/03/ferguson/)

by Alicia von Stamwitz

Did Michael Brown's shooting death in Missouri last August reawaken the civil rights movement?

(/)





(/newsletter/) (https://soundcloud.com/observerdocs)



(https://www.youtube.com/user/UCObserver) [6] (https://www.facebook.com/pages/United-



Church-Observer/127605123918385) (https://twitter.com/UC_Observer) (/rssfeeds/)





Contact us

- Sign up for our newsletter (/newsletter/)
- General Inquiries (/contact/)
- Observer Reps (/resources/)
- Subscriber Services (/subscribe/)
- Advertise (/contact/)
- Promotions (/promo_circ_staff/)
- Classifieds (/classifieds/)
- Submission Guidelines (/2015/07/submission-guidelines-2015.pdf)

About the Observer

Founded in 1829, The United Church Observer is the oldest continuously published magazine in North America and the second oldest in the English speaking world. It has won international acclaim for journalistic excellence and garnered more awards for writing than any other Canadian religious publication. Read more... (/about/)

Masthead

Editor/Publisher: David Wilson Managing Editor: Jocelyn Bell Senior Editor: Caley Moore

Digital Content Editor: Kevin Spurgaitis

Senior Writer: Mike Milne Art Director: Ross Woolford

Editorial Administration: Patricia Ingold

Promotions Manager: Sharon Doran Circulation Manager: Kirsten MacDonell Advertising Director: Maureen Werner

Administrative Assistant: Marilou Manansala

Copyright Information

The Observer regrets that it cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. All contents © 2015 Observer Publications Inc.; may not be reprinted or republished without written permission. The Observer is not responsible for the content of external internet sites. To link to us from your website, contact The Observer's webmaster. Click here (/contact/).

Funding Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.