

# Atheist minister's 'effectiveness' being evaluated

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**After an outspoken clergywoman declared her atheism more than a decade ago, the United Church of Canada (UCC) has just decided to investigate her "effectiveness" as a minister to her congregation.**

This month, UCC's regional body is scheduled to interview Gretta Vosper, who publicly declared herself as an atheist back in 2001. She is also an author and the founder of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, which calls people to abandon their belief in the God of the Bible and set a new path of spiritual "enlightenment."

## What is there to investigate?

The UCC Toronto Conference is initiating a formal investigation — or review — of Vosper, says Rev. David W. Allen, the conference's executive secretary.

"A review is a formal process within the United Church which is ordered when serious questions have been raised about a minister's effectiveness," Allen told *The Christian Post*.

Despite Vosper's proclamation that the God of the Bible is not who He says He is, the UCC still believes she could be an effective minister of the Word of God and is moving forward with interviewing her to determine whether she will still be allowed to spiritually lead her congregants.

"In this case, a team of five people will interview Ms. Vosper," Allen informed. "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."

According to Allen, the interviews will seek to find out whether the self-proclaimed atheist still affirms certain declarations she made when asked about her beliefs at the time she was ordained in the UCC.

With the atheistic worldview she has outwardly declared to both her congregation and Internet following.

many wonder what why the UCC is still going to ask Vosper the following questions it put before her years ago during her ordination, which Allen outlined.

"Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself anew to God?" Allen recited the first question to be presented to Vosper. "Do you believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, and do you accept this call? ... Are you willing to exercise your ministry in accordance with the scriptures, in continuity with the faith of the Church, and subject to the oversight and discipline of The United Church of Canada?"

### **A web of heresy?**

Vosper tells her followers on her website that she publicly came out as an atheist some 14 years ago, indicating that she believes the UCC will accommodate her atheistic beliefs, noting that she regards it as "probably the most progressive Christian denomination in the world."

Vosper even went as far as to admit on her website that she has rejected the God of the Bible while preaching to her congregation — while the UCC stood by and allowed such a discourse without any reported disciplinary action.

"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," Vosper states in the "About" section on her atheist-inciting website. "With them, I've laboured, lamented, lost, and loved."

Vosper encourages her followers to accompany her on her uncertain journey away from God with the empty promise of leading them to an unknown destination — a destination that is made clear in the Bible ... one that is far away from heaven.

"It's a hard road but a worthy one with no finish line in sight," Vosper tells her readers. "Let's walk this road together. I promise you'll be inspired."

### **Not leaving anytime soon?**

If the UCC decides that Vosper's heretical teaching is enough to oust her from her position as minister, it will commence a formal process.

"The UCC refers to defrocking of being when a minister is placed on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary)," The Christian Post reports. "Willful removal involves being placed on the Discontinued Service List (Voluntary)."

According to Allen, the process of disciplining a minister by putting him or her on the Discontinued Service List is a complicated procedure that includes numerous phases and is administered over an extended period of time.

"[It is a] lengthy process because we want to be extremely careful out of concern for both the minister and the church," Allen noted, indicating that uprooting a minister is a sensitive issue — while not addressing the potential continued harm leaving Vosper in her position could possibly inflict upon her congregants.