

Can an atheist be a United Church minister?

Gretta Vosper acknowledges that she's a thorn in the side of her church

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Does Gretta Vosper have the right qualifications to be a minister?

She's articulate. She speaks passionately about civic engagement and shared values. She's been attending services since childhood when she "ran out my backyard and crossed the street to go to church."

But there's just one thing: she's also an atheist.

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"It's very easy to get to a point where you're not a believer of a theistic, supernatural being," Vosper told the CBC's Wendy Mesley, noting that she was taught to wrestle with the concept of God in theological college.

But the paradox of "atheist minister" isn't sitting well with the United Church of Canada. It's reviewing Vosper's position and could potentially remove her from the pulpit of West Hill United Church in Toronto's east end.

It's a showdown that stings for the minister, even though she acknowledges that she's a thorn in the side of her church. On Twitter, she describes herself in her bio as "Irritating the church into the 21st century."

"It really surprised me in the manner in which it has happened and the hostility that it has evoked in the church and amongst my colleagues," Vosper said.

For Vosper, removal from the pulpit would be nothing short of a "betrayal" by her church.

"It has created who I am. It has been a major force in my life. It has taught me what I know. It has given me the tools to explore. It has demanded that I do that and so I've done that and here we are."

Vosper says that many clergy members in mainline liberal denominations across North America have reached similar conclusions about God. Like her, they're keen to put the focus on shared values. But they're not allowed to abandon the traditions and texts of their faith.

"It's all over Facebook. It's all over the internet," said Vosper. "Why do we have to pretend that they can't deal with a difficult conversation?"

You can watch Wendy Mesley's full interview with Gretta Vosper by clicking on the video link above or by watching Friday night's [The National](#).