

Meet the ordained minister who doesn't really believe in God

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Published Wednesday, January 13, 2016 9:55AM EST

An ordained Toronto minister at risk of losing her job says her understanding of God is metaphorical, rather than literal.

Rev. Gretta Vosper has presided over West Hill United Church, located at Kingston Road and Orchard Park Drive in Toronto's east end, for 19 years.

Six months ago, Vosper said she understood her beliefs better and announced that she no longer believes in God.

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"I recognize that the use of traditional language to describe them suggested that I still did believe in those very traditional concepts, so I stopped using the language to make that clear," [Vosper told CTV's Canada AM](#) on Wednesday.

She said she realizes why it appears "problematic," but that she believes that her atheism should not preclude her from preaching.

"In the United Church of Canada, we don't actually take vows, we answer questions... The understanding of the questions could be metaphorical."

Vosper said she doesn't believe in a deity as a being, but has faith in a different concept than the traditional view of God.

She said her understanding of God is relationships of trust, love and forgiveness between people.

"If you think of the positive relationships you have with people and how they strengthen you and give you courage, that's the kind of God development that I believe we are all responsible for doing and making in the world."

PHOTOS



Rev. Gretta Vosper appears on CTV's Canada AM on Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2016.

Vosper said she felt sorry that her revelation was hard on some members of her church. Vosper said some members left because they didn't support an atheist preaching in a house of God.

Others outside of her church community have made comments expressing their disapproval. A columnist for the United Church Observer called her ideas "dangerous," and said she overlooks centuries of conversation within the Christian community.

"While I appreciate Ms. Vosper's call for the United Church to act with greater clarity and integrity ... I can't help but wonder what sort of example she herself is setting," columnist and Rev. [David Ewart wrote on his blog](#).

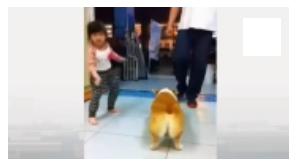
Ewart wrote that he felt she should admit she no longer preaches the church's core beliefs, and "take the steps to leave the United Church."

Despite negative feedback from some people, Vosper said other United Church members left nearby churches to join West Hill because of her beliefs.

Though her parish has changed, she said she has no regrets.

"Humanity is at the stage in its evolution that it has to actually step away from institutions that have in the past been very, very important for its development, but that now really just continue to divide the human community in what can be a very violent and dangerous way," she said.

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78 days ago

An interesting point of view, but a minister in the United Church should believe in God. If she would like to preach atheist beliefs, great, however form your own religion and take your parish. She is not being fair to United Church members who believe in God and who are seeking a United Church to go to with a proper Minister to teach His word.

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**R Toupin**

78 days ago

She isn't the first atheist in the pulpit. However, if a requirement to be a UC minister is an affirmation of their statement of faith, she should have the integrity to step down. It does beg the question as to how she can lead people who believe in god when she doesn't.

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**Heather**

78 days ago

If she has decided that she no longer is a believing Christian, then she has no business as minister of a Christian church congregation. Would that not be the worst kind of hypocritical preaching on a Sunday morning? I would think that given her public statements though, that in effect, she has broken the employment conditions of her church contract, and they would be correct in removing her.

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**Donald Gill**

78 days ago

Unless the UCC is no longer Christian, this person should be let go of, and her misguided congregation can go with her!

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13

**Dave**

78 days ago

Faith is required to please God, and receive Salvation. I don't know how one can preach a message from God without it, or waste ones time listening to a sermon from such a person.

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11

**Mike from Canmore**

78 days ago

Indeed, there are a great many atheist and agnostic ministers, priests, prelates, bishops, rabbis, etc. And even a greater number who don't look at their holy book(s) as being literal, historical fact.

Understandable if anyone really analyzes their holy book and compare it for internal inconsistencies and compare it to contemporary documents and physical history.

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**CanadianGal**

78 days ago

So would this be like a NASA employee not believing in the moon landing? Or how about the curator of the Anne Frank House/Museum denying the holocaust? Seems an odd choice of profession (to remain in). Not to mention a bit disrespectful of the institution that employs you. Plenty of spiritual churches that don't expect you to believe in God to choose from!

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6

**adrifter**78 days ago *(edited)*

I'm an atheist. I find it bewildering why an atheist would wish to remain an ordained minister and to lead a church. That's just bizarre. And it's not really fair to the believers in the congregation. If you are a non-believer, you shouldn't be a minister. Simple. And stop this foolishness that God is love. It states in scripture what God is for believers. Believe it or not.

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**mc**

78 days ago

Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus's central message was not relationships between people. His central message was a relationship with God through Jesus Christ ALONE.

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Russ

78 days ago

I'm all for this woman following her beliefs; however, the United Church does believe in God and her beliefs are apparently at odds with the church. She should do the right thing and resign from the church. If she and those parishioners who support her want to, they can form their own church based on their specific beliefs, but don't expect to remain as a minister within the church.

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