

Report of Conference Interview Committee of its review of the ministry of the Rev. Gretta Vosper

September 7, 2016

Toronto Conference asked its Conference Interview Committee to interview Rev. Gretta Vosper, focusing on whether she continues to affirm the questions in the Basis of Union 11.3 asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission and to report whether she is suitable to continue serving in ordered ministry in The United Church of Canada.

The Committee received written submissions from Ms. Vosper¹ and interviewed her on June 29, 2016. The Committee also received written submissions from West Hill United Church.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that she does not believe in a Trinitarian God. Instead, by 'god/God' she means what is created between people in relationships, but does not exist separate from us, and the construct is not divine. Ms. Vosper does not use the word 'God' because its use is a barrier to some people. She does not believe that Jesus was divine. He is not the Son of God. Jesus is not her Saviour. Ms. Vosper no longer calls herself a Christian. She does not believe that there is a Holy Spirit. Ms. Vosper does not believe that there is a God who calls anyone to ministry. Ms. Vosper does not administer sacraments. She does not consider scripture to be the primary source, but merely one source of information amongst many. She is no longer in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of The United Church of Canada. Instead, Ms. Vosper said that her theology has evolved beyond the doctrine of the United Church.

The majority of the Conference Interview Committee has determined that Ms. Vosper is not suitable to continue as a minister in the United Church. The reasons of the majority and the dissent are set out in this Report.

Rev. Gretta Vosper

Ms. Vosper was called to West Hill United Church in 1997, continues to serve as their sole minister, and is a member of Toronto Southeast Presbytery. She graduated from Queen's Theological College in 1990 and was ordained by Bay of Quinte Conference in 1993.

Ms. Vosper is the author of two books: *With or Without God: Why The Way We Live Is More Important Than What We Believe*² and *Amen: What Prayer Can Mean In A*

¹ The Conference Interview Committee has adopted the style of The United Church of Canada. The first time a minister is referred to, his/her title is used: Rev. Mary Smith. Thereafter, the minister is referred to as Ms./Mr., that is, as Ms. Smith.

*World Beyond Belief*³ and numerous articles. She has given many speeches and addresses, has been interviewed for newspapers, magazines, on radio and television, and she blogs and Tweets on many topics including theology.

Ms. Vosper is the founder and Chair of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, an organization that provides resources and support to those exploring the boundaries of Christian thought both within and outside of their congregations.

Ms. Vosper has been active in her Presbytery and has served as Chair.

Background

This interview did not assess whether Ms. Vosper meets the Standards of Practice with respect to administration, community outreach and social justice, continuing education, denomination and communities, leadership, pastoral care and self-care.⁴ The question that Toronto Conference asked this Committee to address was limited to her beliefs and her theology and their impact on Ms. Vosper's responsibility for faith formation, Christian education and worship.

Presbyteries are responsible for oversight of ministers within their geographic area.⁵ Pursuant to the Effective Leadership Pilot Project, Toronto Southeast Presbytery agreed that Toronto Conference would assume responsibility for the oversight and discipline of its ministers.⁶

In 2015 Toronto Conference received letters and emails and members of its Executive heard concerns that a person who describes herself as an atheist, who does not believe that Jesus ever existed, and who does not accept the authority of scripture could continue to be a minister within the United Church of Canada.

On April 15, 2015 the Executive of Toronto Conference moved that⁷:

... the Executive of Toronto Conference request that the General Secretary of the General Council outline a process for considering concerns that have been raised regarding the on-going status of an ordered minister, with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission in the Basis of Union 11.3

² 2008 HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

³ 2012 HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

⁴ Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel

⁵ *The Manual 2013*, sections C.3.2 and J.3

⁶ *The Manual 2013*, section D. 2.2.2

⁷ Minutes of the Executive of Toronto Conference April 15, 2015

The Conference Executive Secretary, Rev. David Allen, wrote to the General Secretary on April 20, 2015 seeking her advice.

On May 5, 2015 the General Secretary issued a Ruling, stating:

The questions set out in Basis 11.3 relate to belief in God, call to ministry, and the exercise of ministry within the faith of the Church. They go to the suitability of the person to serve in ministry in the United Church. Within our Polity, the Conference Interview Board is the body that is charged with making the assessment of suitability. The mandate of the Conference Interview Board is set out on page 6 of the Conference Committees Resource [2013] and includes:

- (b) assisting the presbyteries and other bodies in determining the suitability of people for functioning as ministry personnel in the United Church;
- (c) reporting the results of the interview to the referring body and the person interviewed;

In my opinion, a person who is not suitable for ministry in the United Church cannot be 'effective' as United Church ministry personnel. Where a question has been raised about the minister's suitability, the presbytery may consider that a question has been raised about 'effectiveness' so as to initiate a review of the minister on that ground. The questions set out in Basis 11.3, which are asked at the time of ordering, are appropriate for assessing on-going suitability.

The General Secretary ruled that the following process would be appropriate to respond to these concerns:

- The Conference (through its Executive or Sub-Executive) orders a review of the minister's effectiveness under Section J.9.3(a) [page 194].
- The Conference may direct the Conference Interview Board to undertake this review, interviewing the minister with a focus on continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission in the Basis of Union 11.3.
- The Conference Interview Board conducts the interview and reports to Conference whether, in the Interview Board's opinion, the minister is suitable to continue serving in ordered ministry in the United Church.
- The Conference receives the report from the Conference Interview Board and decides on appropriate action in response to it. In making its

decision, the Conference may take into account the Basis 11.3 questions as well as Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice.

- If the Conference Interview Board reports that the minister is suitable to continue in ordered ministry, the Conference may decide to take no further action.
- If the Conference Interview Board reports that the minister is not suitable, the Conference may decide to take one or more of the actions contemplated in Section 9.4 [page 195].
- Upon the minister's completion of the action, the Conference decides whether the minister may continue in paid accountable ministry in the United Church as set out in Section 9.8 [page 196]. If the Conference decides the minister is not ready to continue in paid accountable ministry, it must recommend that the minister's name be placed on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary).

Note: In Toronto Conference the Conference Interview Committee has the functions and responsibilities of a Conference Interview Board.

Ms. Vosper appealed the Ruling to the Judicial Committee. On March 17, 2016 the Judicial Committee Executive decided that the Appeal did not meet the grounds for an Appeal as set out in *The Manual 2013* and therefore would not hear the appeal.

Toronto Conference Sub-Executive decided to reinstate its review of Rev. Vosper's ministry⁸ and on May 3, 2016 the Executive Secretary sent a notice to Ms. Vosper setting out the process for the interview to be held on June 16, 2016. Julian Falconer, counsel for Ms. Vosper, was not available on that day and, instead, offered to be available on June 29th for the interview. In response to a request from Mr. Falconer, Mr. Allen sent copies of the written concerns Toronto Conference had received about Ms. Vosper.

On May 10, 2016 Mr. Allen sent Ms. Vosper a revised notice of the interview. The notice set out the Basis of Union 11.3 questions that she would be asked to affirm and advised that she might be asked questions of candidates for ministry at their final interviews for ordination, commissioning or admission. Examples of such questions are found on the website of Toronto Conference. There might be additional questions that follow her responses. Ms. Vosper was invited to send a written response that would be read by the members of the Conference Interview Committee before the interview. Ms. Vosper's submissions (176 pages) were received on June 17th and distributed to the members of the Conference Interview Committee the same day. Ms. Vosper's written response is set out in Appendix "A".

⁸ Minutes of Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference April 1, 2016

On May 10th, Mr. Allen also invited West Hill United Church to send written submissions. On June 16th West Hill sent written submissions that were distributed to the Conference Interview Committee the same day. West Hill's submissions are set out in Appendix "B". On June 27th, West Hill sent a petition in favour of Ms. Vosper and asked that it be permitted to address the Conference Interview Committee. That request was denied.

Process

A Presbytery has oversight of all ministry personnel on its roll⁹ and must take seriously any concerns that come to it about a minister, whether raised by Presbytery itself, another minister in the same congregation, the pastoral charge supervisor, the governing body of the congregation, or a proposal signed by ten full members of the congregation that the governing body of the congregation has passed on to the presbytery.¹⁰ Under the Effective Leadership Pilot Project, each of the four Presbyteries in Toronto Conference agreed that the Conference would assume responsibility for the oversight and discipline of its ministers. Toronto Conference agreed to assume these responsibilities.

After receiving the Ruling from the General Secretary dated May 5, 2015, the Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference determined that the concerns about Ms. Vosper's theology raised a question whether she was effective and ordered a review of her ministry.¹¹

Normally a review of a minister is done by one or more persons appointed by the Conference. The reviewers meet with the minister to explain the process that will be used, to hear the minister's initial input and to receive names of the persons the minister wants to have interviewed. The minister is entitled to have a support person with her and may choose to be represented by legal counsel.¹² The reviewers then meet with persons who may have information that might assist in the review, including those persons identified by the minister. A written summary is prepared setting out what the reviewers have heard and the sources of that information. A copy of the summary is sent to the minister to enable him/her to respond. The minister may choose to prepare written submissions and the reviewers will interview him/her.

The reviewers will determine whether the minister is effective and/or whether s/he recognizes the authority of the presbytery and may make recommendations. Their Report will be sent to the minister and to the Conference that appointed them. The

⁹ *The Manual 2013*, section C.3.2

¹⁰ *The Manual 2013*, section J.9.2

¹¹ *The Manual 2013*, section J.9.3(a)

¹² Pastoral Charge and Ministry Personnel Reviews, Resource Material August 2013

Executive or Sub-Executive of Conference will meet with the minister and a support person to discuss the Report. The minister may choose to have a lawyer present. The reviewers may be asked to attend to answer questions about the process and their Report. The Conference is bound by the reviewers' findings of effective/not effective. Neither the Executive nor Sub-Executive of Conference is bound by the reviewers' recommendations, but makes its own determinations. A minister may seek leave to appeal a final decision of Conference affecting his/her ministry to the Judicial Committee of General Council.¹³

A Conference Interview Board [in Toronto Conference called the Conference Interview Committee] conducts the final interview of candidates whom the presbytery has recommended for commissioning or ordination. The CIC is responsible for examining the candidate:

- (a) to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry by examining their call to ministry, personal character, motives, academic records, doctrinal beliefs, and general fitness for ministry;
- (b) to satisfy itself that the candidate is in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of the United Church;
- (c) to satisfy itself that the candidate, as a member of the order of ministry, will accept the statement of doctrine as being in substance agreeable to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures; and
- (d) to satisfy itself that the candidate will comply with the polity of the United Church.

Before recommending ordination or commissioning, the CIC must be satisfied that the candidate is in essential agreement with the Statement of Doctrine of the United Church and accepts the statement as being in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁴ In making the final decision whether to commission or ordain a candidate, the Conference accepts the determination of the CIC.¹⁵

In Toronto Conference, Interview Teams, which are subsets of the CIC of at least three persons, interview each candidate using the questions of personal life and faith, practice of ministry, call and commitment, and doctrinal beliefs that are posted on the Toronto Conference website. Candidates send the CIC written responses to these questions. Candidates are accompanied to their interviews by a support person. Lawyers are not part of the interview process. Because of time constraints, the Interview Team usually asks only a subset of the questions on the website, focusing on issues that may have arisen in the written submissions. At the end of the interview, the Interview Team makes a recommendation to the CIC whether the candidate should be commissioned or ordained. The entire CIC discusses the candidate and makes its own determination of whether to commission or ordain

¹³ *The Manual 2013*, section J.13.2 and J.13.3

¹⁴ Basis of Union, section 11.2

¹⁵ Basis of Union, section 11.1; *The Manual 2013*, section H.6.3.2

that person. The CIC is not bound by the recommendations of the Interview Team. The decision of the CIC is final. The candidate may seek leave to appeal a negative determination to the Judicial Committee of General Council.¹⁶

Before a person is ordained, the candidate must answer the following questions:¹⁷

Jesus Christ came into the world to be the servant of God and all people. As servant Lord, Jesus called his Church to a ministry of worship, witness, and reconciliation. In baptism we were received as members of his Church and at confirmation we committed ourselves to its ministry. In order that this ministry of the whole Church may be fulfilled, God has given the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, and the diaconal ministry of Education, Service, and Pastoral Care. It is the responsibility of the Church to seek, train, and set apart those whom God calls so to serve.

To each Candidate for Ordination:

1. Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself anew to God?
2. Do you believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, and do you accept this call?
3. 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?

If the candidate is unable or unwilling to answer yes to each of these three questions, s/he will not be ordained.

The Ruling of the General Secretary set out a process that is a hybrid of a review as to the effectiveness of a minister and an interview to determine whether a candidate is suitable to be ordained in the United Church.

This is the first occasion in which the Church has used the Ruling and every effort was made to ensure fairness to Ms. Vosper. On May 20, 2016 she received notice of the interview including the questions that would be asked on June 29th. She was invited to send written responses to the questions, which she did, and which were read by the CIC. West Hill United Church was invited to send written submissions, which they did and which were read by the CIC. Ms. Vosper chose the Chair of the Board at West Hill, Randy Bowes, to be her support person and she brought her lawyers, Julian Falconer and Akosua Matthews, to the interview. The Interview Team asked questions focusing on Ms. Vosper's continuing affirmation of the questions asked of all candidates at the time of ordination, commissioning or admission in the Basis of Union 11.3. The questions asked are at Appendix "C" and

¹⁶ *The Manual 2013*, section J.13.2 and J.13.3

¹⁷ Basis of Union, section 11.3

are a subset of the questions asked of candidates for ordination and are found on the website of Toronto Conference. Additional questions were asked that arose from the responses of Ms. Vosper and are found at Appendix “D”. Mr. Falconer participated in the interview by objecting to some questions, seeking clarification of others and making submissions. The members of the CIC deliberated and made the decision. This Report includes the decision, the reasons for the decision, the dissent, and the recommendations.

Interview

In reporting about the interview, the Conference Interview Committee has used the edited responses Ms. Vosper posted on her website. If there was no response posted to a question asked, the Committee has relied on its notes.

Ordination vows

Ms. Vosper advised the Conference Interview Committee that at her ordination by Bay Of Quinte Conference in 1993, she was not asked the questions in the Basis of Union 11.3, but rather had been asked:¹⁸

Within the ministry of the whole people of God, you are called to a ministry of Word and Sacrament and Pastoral Care. You are to exercise your ministry in accordance with the scriptures and in continuity with the faith of the Church. With God’s people, you are to discern the needs, concerns and hopes of the world and proclaim by word and deed the justice of God’s reign.

You are to love and service the people among whom you work, caring alike for the young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor.

You are to teach and preach, to declare God’s judgment and forgiveness and announce God’s blessing in the assembly of the people, to lead in prayer and preside at the font of baptism and at the table of the Lord.

You are to nourish, and be nourished by Christ’s people from the riches of God’s grace and, together with them, to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.

Each candidate for ordination was asked:

- a. I ask you therefore, do you believe in God who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, and who works in us and others by the Holy Spirit?

¹⁸ Written Submissions Rev. Gretta Vosper, Appendix “A”, at pages 18 - 19

- b. Do you believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Call and do you accept this call?
- c. Will you, with Christ's people, be faithful in prayer and in the study of scripture, that you may know the mind of Christ?
- d. Will you endeavor to teach and preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received?
- e. Will you be faithful in the pastoral care of all whom you are called to serve, laboring together with them to build up the household of God?
- f. 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?

May God, who has given you the will to do these things, give you the grace and power to perform them.

Gretta Vosper told the Committee that she was asked these questions in 1993 and that she had answered "I do; I will".

Alternate ordination vows

Because Ms. Vosper made repeated references that she was asked different ordination vows than those found in the Basis of Union 11.3, the Committee sought an explanation of the differences.

In 1986 General Council asked the Division of Mission in Canada to develop alternate vows for ordination and commissioning. A committee was established and, after study, made recommendations. On June 11, 1992, the General Council Executive made alternative vows available to the Conferences for use on a trial basis on the understanding that the alternate vows would be evaluated after a period of review and study.¹⁹ Some Conferences chose to use alternate vows.

When a proposal to change the ordination vows came before the 36th General Council in 1997, the issue of whether a Remit was necessary before the vows could be changed was referred to the Judicial Committee Executive and, if the answer were Yes, to authorize a Remit.²⁰

On November 10, 1997 the Judicial Committee Executive determined that a Remit was required before the Church could experiment with wording changes to the

¹⁹ Proceedings of General Council 36, pages 929 - 933

²⁰ Proceedings of General Council 36, page 933

vows for ordination, commissioning and admission. The Executive went on to provide that those who had been ordained, commissioned, or received using experimental vows during the period 1992 to November 10, 1997 remained members of the Order of Ministry.²¹

No Remit about ordination vows was ever issued and those Conferences that had used experimental language for these vows, reverted to the language in Basis of Union 11.3.

In 2015 General Council 42 considered proposals from Toronto Conference and Hamilton Conference to undertake a broad based review of the Basis of Union 11.3 that deals with the preamble and questions posed as persons are ordained, commissioned or admitted, to ensure their continued relevance and effectiveness as the Church moved forward in support of our ministry leaders. Toronto Conference's proposal was narrowly defeated and the proposal from Hamilton Conference was referred to the General Council Executive as unfinished business.²²

On the recommendation of the Permanent Committee on Governance and Agenda, the General Council Executive voted to take no action on Hamilton Conference's proposal at its April 2016 meeting.²³

The Committee considered both the vows that Ms. Vosper made in 1993 as well as the vows set out in the Basis of Union 11.3

The Committee asked the following questions:

i. What is your understanding of God?

Ms. Vosper chose to answer this question using the words from the Basis of Union, section 11.3: God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ms. Vosper said that she does not believe in a Trinitarian God, composed of three persons equal in essence, a being who presides over earth from another realm, a supernatural one, from which it has the power to intervene in the natural world – capriciously or by design – by responding to our prayerful requests, or altering our minds and so, too, our actions, or intervening in the natural world with or without provocation or invitation in order to alter weather patterns, health, the accumulation or loss of wealth, the circumstances of birth including geography – a predictor of health and access to food and water – gender, sexuality, mental capacity, or beauty – all predictors of the power status and ease with which individuals will live their lives, then, no, she does not believe in that at all. Ms. Vosper told the Committee that neither does she believe in a god of no substance who exists beyond the universe yet contains it,

²¹ Decision of the Judicial Committee Executive, November 10, 1997, at page 8

²² Proceedings of Partridgeberry Commission, General Council 42 (2015)

²³ Minutes of the General Council Executive April 2016

interpenetrating it in some incomprehensible way for some incomprehensible purpose.

Ms. Vosper sees no evidence of such gods. And so she said that there is no reason to remain aligned with a doctrine that does not fit the contemporary and ever-evolving scientific understandings of the universe or ethical perspectives on human dignity and rights. She also said that there is no reason why we should eschew the scholarship of the countless theologians who have argued for centuries, that the doctrine of the Trinity is unworthy of our intellectual consideration, let alone our allegiance. Ms. Vosper said that there is no reason to require of anyone who comes to us for service of any kind, including participation in the creation of vibrant, meaningful communities, acknowledgment of or belief in Trinitarian or any other form of ecclesial language and the subsequent study and support they will require to move beyond traditionally held interpretations of that language with which they most likely arrive at our doors. She said that the only faithomable [sic] reason that the Church might consider holding to the doctrine of the Trinity and commencing an ongoing program of investigation of clergy that requires assent to that doctrine in order for their ministry to be considered effective is the maintenance of the United Church's membership in the World Council of Churches. Ms. Vosper said that the work of ministry with individuals and communities of transformation is more integral to the work of the Church than membership in an organization.

Ms. Vosper said that even if she were given incontrovertible proof that a god does or gods do exist, the evidence of the cruel and capricious realities of disparity, tragedy, illness, and anguish in the world, and the truth that our world and our experience of it is wrapped not only in beauty but also in excruciating pain, would prevent her from worshipping it or pledging her allegiance to it, no matter the cost.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that what she does believe has come to her through a heritage that is rich in church and in the United Church into which she was born and raised. She said: "It is rooted in my family that, like many families, transmitted positive values to its children. These same positive values have also been projected by humanity, alongside other, more dangerous values, to become the attributes of the transcendent, divine, supernatural beings that we have called gods. During times when social cohesion was crucial to the survival of small tribal communities, fear of those deities provided a powerful antidote to individual expression or actions that might threaten the community's well-being – murder, theft, adultery, abortion, homosexual behaviours. These became offences against gods and came with god-sized punishments. Twinning social laws with supernatural beings may have been an evolutionary twist that provided for our survival."

Ms. Vosper said that it does not follow, however, that supernatural beings provided the moral codes or values by which we choose to live. She said that while the values instilled in her as a child were values reinforced by her church school and Christian upbringing, they are not values exclusive to that upbringing. And she said that there are no moral codes that have been formed by the mind of god. Rather she told the

Committee, there is a morality that we have created and that transcends our personal circumstances. It is a morality that we have the responsibility to review and revise as we each see necessary for our wholeness and, she hopes, social cohesion, which is so integral to our well-being, our future as a species, and our impact on the future of all on the planet. It is in these non-doctrinal things that Ms. Vosper said that she has faith.

Ms. Vosper said that she believes in love and that for her, love is the most sacred value. When she calls something sacred, she said that she means that it is so crucial to our humanness, to our humanity, that we cannot risk its denigration, degradation, or destruction. To live without that sacred thing – in this case love – would mean we had repudiated our evolved and critically negotiated humanity.

Ms. Vosper said that what she understands about love is not a simplistic, self-serving love. Instead, she means a costly, challenging, transformative love that pulls us beyond the people we think we were, the people we may have been content to remain, in order that our humanity be more complex. She told the Committee that love refuses to count its cost, seeking, rather, to disperse that cost into community, pulling us toward one another as it does so and beyond the divisions that otherwise might leave us in isolation.

Ms. Vosper said that there are religious texts and biblical stories that can be interpreted in the light of that kind of love, some of which may even seem to tell of the most complete embodiment of it that has ever walked the earth. These are questions of interpretation. She told the Committee that biblical examples are not integral to the understanding or the living out of love and that anyone, regardless of creed or ideology or even ignorant of such things, may still live in accordance with a costly love. Ms. Vosper said that she believes that the greater portion of humanity chooses to do so.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that our Christian forbearers were seekers after truth. She referenced Dean William Sparrow, who is said to have ended every lecture with the words: “Seek the truth, cost what it will, come whence it may, lead where it might.” She mused that Dean Sparrow was challenging his students for a life in the ministry that would not be compromised by the quitting of intellectual integrity. She suggested that he was coaching them to hold to what they were learning and to go out into ministry without forgetting to continue to learn. Ms. Vosper said that the quest for truth is never over, and so it remains at the top of the list of those things in which she believes. Ms. Vosper said that she believes in truth and believes that it is important to seek truth, no matter where it comes from, no matter what we may lose in the process, no matter where we end up. She told the Committee: “It is my commitment to truth – both seeking it and sharing it – that has brought us here today.”

There are some who have argued courage is the greater virtue because it is required to live out any of the others, but Ms. Vosper said that she believes love badgers

courage into being, and when love fails to do so, she believes that truth picks up the rant. She said: “Love and truth can exist without courage but almost as soon as one or the other emerges, courage is a must. Courage is a must if we are to do anything to protect those we love or to strive toward truth, no matter its cost or destination. Love without truth or truth without love can both deny wholeness.”

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that courage without either breeds indifference or savage violence. She said: “Violence bred by love and justice, is tempered by the very root of its action, which can only ever be to restore rights or to secure safety. It is in the interweaving of these three virtues that positive change happens, in our hearts, in our relationships, in our communities and in the world.”

It is these virtues – love, truth, and courage – that provide for all the rest upon which Ms. Vosper said that her ministry is built.

Ms. Vosper said: “All of these virtues can be found explicitly or implicitly in stories from the Bible, but they do not originate there. To suggest that they did would be inconsistent with contemporary scholarship and dishonor the human story, both of which predated and ran parallel with its writing. To present them as having been created by a god and given to us is to refuse humanity credit for its most noble accomplishment. It also removes our right and inherent responsibility, as their creator and agent, to bring to the fore or limit certain of them as the needs of the human community evolve.”

She told the Committee that hope, as the promise of something we cannot assure, is deeply rooted in our Christian heritage. Ms. Vosper said that she does not speak of hope; she chooses to create, to accompany, to name, to comfort, to acknowledge, to embrace, to lament, to encourage, to convict, to trust again. She said that she cannot bring about a peaceful death with only hope. She said that she cannot mitigate the effects of corporatism, or global climate change with only hope; she cannot redress our tragic history with Indigenous peoples with only hope; and she cannot address poverty, violence, xenophobia, arrogance, or illness with only hope. Ms. Vosper said that only if she has a hammer in her hand, only if action congruent with our responsibilities as human beings to alleviate suffering or redress abuse is in the offering or underway, will she offer the word ‘hope’. She said that she will not offer hope to mollify or comfort when to do so does not alleviate pain or suffering, does not create right relationship, does not forestall death, but only pretends all these things might be achieved and so anesthetizes us to their reality with an illusion that comforts we who extend it more than those to whom we dispense it. Ms. Vosper told the Committee that she does not offer an empty hope and would not wish one offered to her.

The Interview Team asked whether hope, faith and justice were God. Ms. Vosper answered that she has stopped using the word ‘God’ because it is a barrier to participation in the Church. Instead, she speaks of who God is for her. Ms. Vosper

explained that they do not sing sacred music at West Hill and she doesn't use the word 'God' there.

When questioned, Ms. Vosper said that for her 'God' is what is created between us. Although we cannot measure or describe it, Ms. Vosper said that it is the power in relationships that is pure and strong, but she does not call this 'God'.

Ms. Vosper was asked whether God was anything more than a construct between two people. She answered: "No, I don't believe so." She acknowledged that the construct has a power beyond us, but it does not exist separate from us. It is dependent upon us.

The Interview Team then asked if she believed in a metaphorical God. Ms. Vosper responded that she does not use the word 'God' because using archaic words is a barrier. Traditionally, the word 'God' is of a supernatural being. Ms. Vosper said that she no longer uses the word 'God' because she doesn't believe in such a being. She would not use metaphors for God in worship.

ii. Who is Jesus Christ for you?

Ms. Vosper said that Jesus is a historical figure with healing skills who lived some time at the beginning of the Common Era. She said that the record of his life is spotty; he was an itinerant Middle Eastern preacher who managed to engage a group of people who were looking for the same things. Ms. Vosper said that she does not see Jesus as divine. She told the Committee that Jesus was not the Son of God and that Jesus is not her Saviour.

Ms. Vosper was asked whether she called herself a Christian. She answered that ten or twelve years ago she wrote two articles that were published side by side. One set out all the pluses of Christianity. The other set out all the negatives. Today, Ms. Vosper never calls herself a Christian.

iii. What is your understanding of the Holy Spirit?

Ms. Vosper responded that the Holy Spirit is a construct of the early church that grew up to deal with the various factions in the Church. She said that there is no such thing as the Holy Spirit.

iv. Given your understanding of God, why do you call yourself an atheist?

Ms. Vosper responded that because she does not believe in a divine supernatural being who may or may not move and act in the world, the traditional understanding of the word 'God', she does not use the word 'God'. Ms. Vosper said that she first identified as a non-theist, but then realized that it could include something that had

an agency. In 2008 she began calling herself a theological non-realist. Ms. Vosper said that she has used the words atheist and non-theist interchangeably because she rejects a belief in a theist God.

Ms. Vosper explained that she first identified as an atheist in 2013 in solidarity, with four Bangladeshi bloggers, secular humanists, who were arrested and threatened with execution following the brutal murder of Rajib Haider and with Fazil Say, the Turkish pianist, who was sentenced to ten months in prison for identifying as an atheist. By calling herself an atheist, Ms. Vosper said that she was joining the voices of others in condemning the actions of the Bangladeshi government.

v. How do you articulate your call and commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ and the ministry of The United Church of Canada?

Ms. Vosper said that she was never asked to commit to the ministry of Jesus Christ. She has a commitment to the United Church. Ms. Vosper said that she believes that a spiritual commitment is the challenge of living out one's convictions and that she could live out this commitment by becoming a United Church minister.

vi. How do you minister to those in a congregation who have different theologies and beliefs that you do?

Ms. Vosper responded that she ministers the same way to those who do not agree with her as she does to those who agree with her. She considers pastoral care as working with others, to making herself available to others who are in crisis. She is not a trained counselor and therefore refers persons with such needs to qualified professionals. Ms. Vosper said that she understands spiritual direction to take the form of accompaniment, to repair, to commit to right relations.

vii. How do you explain the theology of baptism?

Ms. Vosper said that West Hill does not use a Trinitarian formula for baptism. When she began at West Hill, she used alternative language suggested by the United Church. Over the years the language she uses for baptism at West Hill has evolved. Ms. Vosper said that she explains to the parents that she would not be using the traditional language for the baptism, that they would not receive a baptismal certificate, and that the World Council of Churches would not recognize the baptism.

When asked what are persons at West Hill baptized into, Ms. Vosper said that she does not speak of the Christian Church. Rather, she incorporates the characteristics or qualities the parents want to instill in their child and speaks about the challenge this will provide for the congregation.

viii. What does the sacrament of communion mean to you?

Ms. Vosper responded that communion is a communal sharing of bread. At West Hill, people bring food into a room beside the gathering hall. Juice and bread are at the front of the church. Ms. Vosper said that she speaks about gathering around the table because it is around tables that we have conversations, learn things about one another, and fall in love. She said that she does not use the traditional words of a communion service. At the end of the gathering, the doors to the adjacent room are opened and food is brought in for the celebration.

ix. How do you understand mystical experiences?

Ms. Vosper responded that mystical experiences are personal experiences and, although she has never had one, Ms. Vosper doesn't deny that others have had them. She said that even if two persons have the same experience, they may use different words to describe the experience. Ms. Vosper has heard Marcus Borg say that he had mystical experiences. When Ms. Vosper has a migraine, she does not see this experience as mystical.

x. What is worship to you?

West Hill calls Sundays 'gathering', not worship. Ms. Vosper said: "We come together to strengthen our relationships, to strengthen our love for each other, to inspire each other through music and readings to be as whole and beautiful as we can be. West Hill celebrates what we have done. We convict ourselves when we fall short."

xi. For you, what is prayer?

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that prayer at West Hill is now called 'community sharing'. Ms. Vosper said that she explains to newcomers what is going to happen and often ties what is being done with traditional worship. For example, a person may say that they are concerned about X. The congregation will respond, "May love abound." She said that community sharing ends with the words of commitment. Ms. Vosper said that in her experience, this is the prayer that is answered. Someone might come forward and offer to assist. She gave an example, that during community sharing a person spoke about a professor who was denied admission to Canada because he had a child with Down's syndrome. Someone in the congregation, who has Down's syndrome, stood up and affirmed that person's concerns.

Vows of Ordination in the Basis of Union 11.3

xii. Do you believe in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you commit yourself to God?

Ms. Vosper answered that if the Interview Team meant the Trinitarian God as she had talked about before, then, no, she does not.

Ms. Vosper went on to say that the question may have served to direct our commitment to God because God transcends our own perspective, our own self-serving ideas. She said: “When the questions of ordination were framed, very likely before 1908, those who wrote them could not have been unaware of the effects of secularization on Christianity, particularly in the three denominations coming into the union. They could not have been unaware of the new interpretations of God that, Trinity or no, were non-traditional in nature. To commit ourselves to God meant we weren’t in this for ourselves, we were in it for a higher, nobler reason no matter what we meant when we used the word ‘God’. She said that the question challenged us to reach beyond ourselves because we were committing ourselves to something that radically transcended our own capabilities.”

Without God, that transcendent, nobler point of reference to which we have committed ourselves in the past, Ms. Vosper asked herself whether it was possible that we might, then, commit ourselves to something mundane and self-serving, something that, in fact, arises out of our ego rather than out of concern for wholeness and social cohesion? She answered: “Of course it is. Without an intention to broaden our awareness, make use of our evolved and empathy-producing anterior cingulate, that is exactly what we might very well do. To do so would be, in essence, a compromise of our humanity, and take us back to “the limited, and socially-tense world of the chimpanzees.” What makes us different from chimpanzees is that we figured out a strategy for survival that is less taut with potential violence.”

Ms. Vosper told the Committee: “Our basic strategy could be phrased this way: ‘to achieve personal wholeness and social cohesion’ at the same time, balancing them out to our best advantage and creating societies that manage the dramatic tension those two goals create. If we don’t achieve personal wholeness, comprised of a healthy balance of our spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional selves, we don’t thrive, we simply exist. If we cannot build social cohesion, we have no means through which we can achieve personal wholeness; lives are constantly under threat, something to which the current realities of refugee camps and the nations that spawn them attest. Humanity, if it is to survive and develop a robust reproductive strength – admittedly evolutionary terms – must develop healthy and autonomous personalities and do so within cooperative social groups. Belief systems – religions – have been a major tool in the facilitation and maintenance of a helpful balancing of self and community interests. That’s one theory.”

Ms. Vosper said: “When the gods of our creation fall away, as I believe that they have been forced to do by the rise of reason and the constant erosion of supernatural belief by science, we still need to find something, a belief system that calls us to do that work – help us keep the equilibrium between personal self-interest and communal well-being. West Hill is doing this.” West Hill’s Mission Statement states: ‘Moved by a reverence for life to pursue justice for all, we inspire one another to seek truth, live fully, care deeply and make a difference’. Ms. Vosper told the Committee that she commits herself to West Hill’s values and to living out this challenge.

xiii. Do you believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, and do you accept this call?

Ms. Vosper answered the question in segments.

a. Do you believe that God is calling you...?

Ms. Vosper said that she does not believe in gods who can intervene in the natural world and therefore cannot believe that there is something we could define as a ‘call’ from any god to us to direct us to act in any particular way.

Ms. Vosper said she understands the importance of conviction as a virtue in our lives, a deeply felt recognition that one is to follow a certain path or forge a new one. She told the Committee that she believes that such convictions can be inspired by personal experience – both known and unremembered; our relationships – both good and bad; and our contexts – both the personal and global. Ms. Vosper said that she believes our appreciation of life and our experience of wholeness results from how closely one is able to live according to one’s convictions. She said that the spiritual quest is the search for that point of resonance – that place of passion and conviction – where one’s own skills and abilities best meet the world’s greatest needs. Ms. Vosper said that she believes the spiritual task is the challenge of living in that place of conviction.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that when she entered theological college, it was the result of years of struggling with a conviction that the most meaningful way in which she could be of influence in the world – the place where her skills and abilities could best meet the world’s needs – was through the work of inspiration and transformation, work she had witnessed in profound and moving ways by the leaders in the United Church. She said that her conviction was further galvanized during her theological training, most particularly through the teaching and mentoring of Christopher Levan and Doug Patterson, and the exploration there of the theologies of liberation, collaboration, and radicalization. For her, these theologies were reinforced by United Church activists and theologians during her time at Queen’s and further entrenched in the gospel stories about the man called Jesus. She said that they also further reinforced her convictions that it was in

ministry that her gifts could best be used to serve the world at one of its points of urgent need.

b. Do you believe God is calling you to the ministry of the Word?

Ms. Vosper responded that if 'Word' meant the Bible was the sole source or the primary source from which she is to draw wisdom for herself or those to and with whom she ministers or that our ethical and moral choices must be grounded in its content, then no, she does not consider herself engaged in a ministry of the Word nor does she accept a call to that ministry.

Ms. Vosper went on to say that her ministry was built on the wisdom accumulated by and within humanity over the course of its history, including but not limited to the documents of our religious tradition. She stated that the authority of a text lies in its message and not in its source or the source to which it is attributed. Ms. Vosper said that many stories in the Bible would not meet West Hill's standards of merit as they present depictions of relationships of power and privilege, many of which include violence, to which they do not ascribe or are set within a worldview they no longer accept. Since 2004, West Hill's sources for wisdom were identified in their congregational documents as 'diverse'. She told the Committee that she is challenged to source texts for their gatherings that meet West Hills' standards of love, justice and compassion and that will inform, inspire, edify, or convict. These sources may be from ancient documents or contemporary pop culture or from anything in between. They may be from art, poetry, prose, literature, fiction, biography, screenplay, or script, or any field of non-fiction. West Hill has a library of accumulated wisdom that is added to daily. Ms. Vosper dips into that library to find material that addresses the concerns of the day and engages the congregation.

c. Do you believe God is calling you to the ministry of Sacrament(s)?

Ms. Vosper responded by saying that if Sacraments meant liturgical devices through which she, as an ordained person, is able to change ordinary items into signs of God's grace, requirements for full leadership, or acceptance to membership in community, then, no, she does not consider herself engaged in such a ministry nor does she accept a call to that ministry.

Ms. Vosper went on to say that she understands her ministry to be the calling of one another to witness the passage of one's own life and of the lives of others and that there are moments along life's trail when that is important and meaningful and best done in community. Ms. Vosper said that she understands her ministry invites her to lift up those moments for those with whom she ministers and to invite them to stand witness to one another's brokenness and wholeness and to commit to standing with, in love, no matter what. She believes the moment of dignity and memory that is created can be powerful affirmations of life, being, and community.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that she believes that the symbolic ritual of marking a child with water is a parent's opportunity to articulate the qualities of character they commit to instill in their child. It is also the community's opportunity to embrace and celebrate the possibilities inherent in each new life and to pledge themselves to the support of keeping those possibilities large.

Ms. Vosper said that she believes that the symbolic ritual of breaking bread is a community's opportunity to 're-member' itself and its commitments to one another.

Ms. Vosper told the Committee that she believes the symbolic rituals for forgiveness, reconciliation, love, leave-taking, marriage, transformation, divorce, new commitments, death, and grief hold the space in which individuals are invited to move into, through, or beyond significant places on their life's journeys. Visual art that marks these moments has become significant for West Hill. Ms. Vosper said that it is her privilege to work with members of West Hill and beyond to create meaningful symbolic actions and rituals that allow that sacred space to emerge.

d. Do you believe God is calling you to the ministry of Pastoral Care?

Ms. Vosper responded that if the ministry of pastoral care meant the rendering of spiritual care, direction, and counseling to individuals, couples, families, groups, and a congregation that is undergirded by the Holy Spirit or that presumes to guide those under care toward greater discernment of God's plan for their lives, whether through guided self-exploration or study of the Bible or devotional resources based on it, then, no, she does not consider herself to be engaged in such a ministry nor does she accept a call to that ministry.

Ms. Vosper went on to say that if pastoral care is meant to be working with others in their pursuit of right relationship with self, others, and the planet either with a focus on long term goals or as needed in times of crisis, she does not believe that her position gives her the right to impose herself upon people at times of illness, bereavement, or crises but rather to make herself available as and when needed and to ensure that individuals, particularly those experiencing crises, know that she is available should they choose to avail themselves of her presence.

Ms. Vosper acknowledged that she is not a trained counselor and therefore said she does not enter into counseling relationships for which she is not qualified.

Ms. Vosper said that she understands that in times of crisis, pastoral care is the work of being present in situations of grief, loss, anger, and confusion in an empathetic way, open to the needs of others and responding as and how she is able, sufficient to the validation of experience, the provision of support, and the witness of love and compassion. Ms. Vosper stated that pastoral care is also the work of providing safe space to individuals, couples, or groups wherein individuals can build trust and speak openly with respect while risking appropriately the work of growth and

understanding. She said that creating such space requires an understanding of appropriate boundaries and the creation of them.

The long term work of pastoral care might be considered spiritual direction which Ms. Vosper said she understands to be the work of accompanying an individual as they undertake a spiritual quest to find a place at which his or her gifts might best be offered to an urgent need in the world. She told the Committee that its purpose is to draw individuals towards a greater understanding of their potential, opportunities, unresolved grief, and unacknowledged strengths in order that they develop resilience in their personal lives, and within their relationships. She said it is to repair and recommit to right relationship with self, others, and the planet as is appropriate given the history and contextual realities of the individual(s) involved.

Ms. Vosper stated that she practices all these things in her work at West Hill.

e. Do you believe God is calling you to the ordained ministry?

Ms. Vosper responded that if ordained meant 'set apart' by being provided extraordinary and spiritual gifts that allow for the discernment of a divine plan or message in an ancient text or the consecration of juice, bread, or water into sacred elements that have the power to transmit the grace of a supernatural god called God to humans otherwise mired in sin in order to mark them as recipients of that grace to whom she might then extend the comfort of that god, then, no, she does not feel conviction about that ministry.

Ms. Vosper went on to say that her work is an understanding that both awakens individuals to the importance of creating meaningful lives for themselves and contributing to the meaningful-making work of others, and that supports them in that work. She said that it is the work of challenging individuals and communities to reach toward both personal wholeness and social cohesion – the balance which, when achieved, leads to success in the human community. Ms. Vosper referenced five significant tasks of religion identified by Phillip Goldberg:

- Transmission – of a sense of identity transmitted from one generation to the next through a variety of means – ritual, shared custom and stories, and historical continuity.
- Translation – of the events of life into a form that helps convey a sense of meaning and purpose and which helps individuals understand their relationship to the wider community of greater whole.
- Transaction – individuals and communities are better able to flourish when the transactions that take place between them are governed by formal or informal moral codes. These define what right relationship means within the community.

- Transformation – encourages the engagement of individuals and communities in ongoing maturation and growth in the pursuit of personal and social fulfillment.
- Transcendence – provides a reference point beyond the individual or community that challenges them to expand beyond their understanding to experience themselves as integrated with a larger whole, the web of life. This can be understood as the realization of the impact one has on the vast expanse of life both during and beyond his or her lifetime and does not require belief in a supernatural realm.

Ms. Vosper said that these tasks go toward creating the balance between personal wholeness and social cohesion and recognizes them as deeply human undertakings for which religion has been the purveyor. But she said that each may be engaged or fulfilled without the need for religious language or doctrine.

ix. 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?

Ms. Vosper chose to answer this question in segments.

a. Exercising ministry in accordance with scriptures?

Ms. Vosper responded by saying that within the context of a community that sets for itself the work of engaging in contemporary issues with courage, clarity, and compassion, most scripture is obscure at best, most often irrelevant, and at its worst, dangerously prone to misguiding those studying it.

Ms. Vosper went on to explain that Biblical scholarship has long required that biblical texts be strained through a variety of sieves in order to ensure that they are presented appropriately for contemporary audiences and not vulnerable to our own circumscribed perspectives. These include but are not limited to setting the text in a historical, political, and social context; identifying the author and the community to which he wrote; examining the use of words and phrases in the text as they are used in the original languages elsewhere in the Bible to decipher the particular intention of the author; examining conflicting texts not only for the validation of claims within the text but to examine existing arguments or positions against which the text was written; addressing any assumptions or privilege introduced into the text by its author, and finally, guessing at the meaning of the text or intentions of the author to the best of one's abilities.

Given the challenges presented by a text that ranges in age from nineteen to twenty-eight centuries and the breadth of interpretation legitimated by a wide variety of theological and scholarly perspectives, Ms. Vosper said that she does not understand what exercising her ministry in accordance with the scriptures means.

b. Exercising ministry in continuity with the faith of the Church?

In responding, Ms. Vosper referenced her written submissions in which she spoke of her theological development from her youth through her theological training and on to the continuing education she undertakes as an ordered minister within the United Church.

In that description, Ms. Vosper presented her experience of and development within a denomination that, at much cost to itself, explored beyond the realms of belief that had been charted by previous generations. She said that in that important and ground-breaking work, it was the first church to do many extraordinary things, always leading with an interpretation of the faith that called it and its members to greater love, compassion, and truth. Ms. Vosper said that the United Church was able to do those things because it regularly and repeatedly held the Bible and the doctrines of the church subordinate to the principle of love and all that required of it and us. And by doing so, she said, the United Church has been an inspiration to other mainline Protestant denominations, to its leaders, and to its members.

Ms. Vosper said that the process of change within West Hill consists of the evolution of a congregation of The United Church of Canada ‘within the faith of the church’ insofar as ‘within’ can be described as a reasonable application of scholarship, reason, the discernment of truth, and the subordination of doctrine to the principle of love.

Ms. Vosper recounted that about a decade ago, West Hill began referring to itself as a ‘spiritual community of faith growing out of the Christian tradition.’ In her view, that language was prescient. She said that while that language ensured that West Hill held to their roots, bringing much-loved traditions, hymn tunes, and symbols, values that it continues to share with the wider church, and a commitment to actions the United Church initiates or embraces, it also encouraged West Hill to create space in their community for those who were uncomfortable with ecclesial language, who honoured the value and the work of the United Church but did not want to participate in doctrinally focused services of worship. She told the Committee that this decision has allowed West Hill to be present to many in their immediate community, and across the Greater Toronto Area. Ms. Vosper said that this decision has placed West Hill as a leader in the evolution of church beyond the beliefs that divide. West Hill’s materials are used in schools and in churches around the world. She said that the evolution of West Hill has taken place over sixty-six years.

c. Exercising your ministry subject to the oversight and discipline of The United Church of Canada?

Ms. Vosper responded that she has only ever exercised her ministry subject to the oversight and discipline of the United Church.

Ms. Vosper went on to say that she has a deep respect for the men and women who, over the decades, crafted and evolved an institutional structure that placed the ideals of ministry and its practice within the reach and engagement of generations of Canadians. They helped form this nation through the widespread influence of their vision and their labours.

Ms. Vosper said that she remains committed to working within that structure even as she invites those who love this Church, as she does, to continue to evolve its practices and polity as new realities and challenges emerge.

Ordination Vows Bay of Quinte Conference 1993

Ms. Vosper said that the vows she made in 1993 were not the same as the vows in the Basis of Union 11.3. Because there are some differences, Ms. Vosper was asked if she continued to affirm the vows she made in 1993. She was asked:

x. Will you, with Christ's people, be faithful in prayer and in the study of scripture, that you may know the mind of Christ?

Ms. Vosper responded that she would engage with anyone about the human accumulation of wisdom, including the lectionary. But she would not use scripture exclusively. Ms. Vosper advised that for more than twenty years West Hill has engaged in book study and that study has transformed West Hill.

xi. Will you endeavor to teach and preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received?

Ms. Vosper repeated her answer to the second Basis of Union vow.

xii. Will you be faithful in the pastoral care of all whom you are called to serve, laboring together with them to build up the household of God?

Ms. Vosper said that she was comfortable with this vow and included what we build between us as the household of God. She said that we must find a way beyond the divisiveness within Christianity and to reach out to those of no faith. She said that it is important that we have the ability to empathize with those who do not look like us or believe what we do.

xiii. What does 'essential agreement' mean to you?

Ms. Vosper said that when the United Church was formed in 1925, three denominations came into the union, each with its separate theologies. 'Essential agreement' was introduced so that all of the ministers could continue to serve. This

is what ‘essential agreement’ means to Ms. Vosper. She said that each Conference determines whether a candidate is in essential agreement²⁴ and, if yes, that person could be ordained.

In her written submissions, Ms. Vosper noted that what a Conference determines essential agreement to be could be entirely different in one Conference than in another.²⁵ She was asked to give an example. In response, Ms. Vosper said that she does not have clarity. She said that she thinks that Saskatchewan Conference is more liberal than London Conference, so may have a different understanding of theology, but she had no specifics.

ix. Today, are you in essential agreement with the Basis of Union, the 1940 Statement of Faith, and A Song of Faith?

Ms. Vosper responded that the answer to this question was up to the Committee to determine. She said that the question was outside the scope of this inquiry.

x. Do you envision that your beliefs will become a new vision for the United Church?

Ms. Vosper responded no, that was not her ministry. She went on to say that West Hill might become the model for other congregations as they try to live out their faith and that the United Church has much to learn from West Hill. Ms. Vosper is concerned that by inviting an American to speak about the non-religious, Presbytery is ignoring the West Hill congregation that has real experience in reaching out to the spiritual but not religious in our communities.

Jurisdiction

Ms. Vosper raised three jurisdictional issues and invited the Conference Interview Committee to decline to participate in this review process. Rather than using the oversight and discipline provisions, she advocated for a collaborative effort or process to improve the United Church. She said that the tools the Committee had been given are not tools that will work.

Ms. Vosper submitted that the interpretation and application of the Church’s disciplinary processes that have led to this review of her ministry, have the capacity to place all clergy and the future of our denomination’s extraordinary and visionary leadership among religious institutions at risk. Ms. Vosper objected to what she termed “this egregious evolution and application of the oversight and disciplinary

²⁴ “... with the Statement of Doctrine of the United Church and accepts the statement as being in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures ...” Basis of Union, section 11.2

²⁵ Rev. Gretta Vosper’s Written Submissions, Appendix “A”, at p. 71

policies of the Church and has concerns for its future”. The three jurisdictional issues raised by Ms. Vosper include:

- i) Effective Leadership Project
- ii) Ruling of the General Secretary; and
- iii) Procedural issues

i) Effective Leadership Pilot Project

Ms. Vosper said that the effect of changes to the oversight and discipline of clergy that resulted from the Effective Leadership Project and the transfer of oversight and discipline of clergy to Conferences from Presbyteries is only now being understood as those changes begin to be applied.

She submitted that the transfer of oversight of ministers from Presbytery to Conference during the Effective Leadership Pilot Project has severely interfered with the covenantal relationships that exist between congregations, the presbyteries to which they belong, and the ministers who serve them both.

Ms. Vosper said that Presbyteries, as direct partners to the covenantal relationship with congregations and ministers, are the court best able to discern the legitimacy and merit of concerns raised about its ministers.

She argued that Conference, with whom most ministers are not in direct relationship prior to disciplinary processes, are unable to adequately assess concerns raised about ministers within their boundaries because they are not within the covenantal relationship and often not in sufficient geographic proximity to ministers to do so.

Ms. Vosper said that the intention of those who clarified for us through the Manual those individuals and courts from whom legitimate concern about the ministers could be heard was to ensure that only those concerns raised by individuals or courts in a direct relationship with the minister had sufficient merit to be worthy of being heard.

She argued that the transfer of oversight and discipline from Presbytery to Conference did not include transfer of responsibility for raising concerns from the Presbytery, the court to which ministers belong; the evidence for this is the absence of either a transfer of covenantal relationship or the establishment of a direct relationship with ministers adequate to replace Presbytery’s relationship.

Ms. Vosper advocated that a review of the effectiveness of any minister as the result of concerns raised by individuals not in the position to have any insight into that person’s ministry, the health of the pastoral charge, or the covenant within which

that ministry takes place is a miscarriage of justice regardless of the reasons for that review.

She submitted that concerns expressed to the General Council by the Church through the Effective Leadership consultation process regarding the centralization of power in an individual Conference staff position, were warranted and that the Presbytery's retention of the right to raise legitimate concerns about their ministers is required in order to mitigate those concerns. She said that those rights should not be extended to Conferences.

Ms. Vosper argued that Conferences assumed the responsibility for raising concerns regarding ministers under the Effective Leadership transfer of oversight and discipline of ministers but that they did not have the explicit approval of the wider Church to do so.

In conclusion, Ms. Vosper submitted that concerns regarding ministers wherever they might have been raised, must be forwarded to the Presbytery of which the minister is a member and that the Presbytery must consider the nature and provenance of the concerns before raising those concerns with the Conference, the court with oversight and disciplinary responsibilities.

ii) Ruling of the General Secretary

Ms. Vosper submitted that the changes to the oversight and discipline of ministers that resulted from the General Secretary's ruling of May 5, 2015 must also be considered by the Church as a whole following the result of this review.

She argued that the Ruling of the General Secretary exceeded her authority and altered the nature of ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Ms. Vosper advocated that those who gave birth to The United Church of Canada had anticipated theological evolution and so declined to include a requirement for theological conformity or continuity among ministers; had they required them, ongoing affirmations of orthodoxy at set points in their ministry would have been included in the Basis of Union.

She submitted that those who have provided for and supported the formation of leaders within the United Church have expected those leaders to continue learning long after departure from theological colleges and that they have encouraged those leaders to seek the truth, come whence it may, cost what it might, lead where it would.

Ms. Vosper argued that the right of the ordaining Conference to contribute to the theological diversity of The United Church of Canada has been undermined with this ruling and that we risk a flattening of that diversity with any application of the General Secretary's Ruling.

She advocated that it is contrary to the Basis of Union for a Conference Interview Committee to review the theological beliefs of ministers ordained in another Conference.

Ms. Vosper lamented that the General Council Executive, being presented with a proposal sent to them as a result of concerns regarding the use of the questions of ordination to judge the effectiveness of ministers and asking for a review of those questions, upon hearing that fifty-one percent of General Council 42 Commissioners did not wish to review those questions, chose to ignore the forty-six percent who sought the conversation.

She concluded by submitting that this decision dramatically diverged from the courage the United Church has previously shown in the face of challenging social and theological issues of the day when, long before a majority of its membership invited exploration of an issue, the Church engaged, witnessing integrity and courage, and modelling participatory and transformational dialogue.

iii) Procedural issues

Ms. Vosper submitted that some of the challenges of this review process, which she alleges risks the health and strength of our denomination and those who serve it, are the result of a lack of due diligence and attention to the polity of the Church and a concern for those it serves to both protect and oversee.

She argued that those who struggled to bring The United Church of Canada into being were well aware of the implications of the term 'essential agreement' when it came to questions of doctrine and intended or expected a breadth of theological perspective to grow and flourish within the Church.

Ms. Vosper advocated that those who wrote and have revised the Statements of Doctrine over the years did not intend that doctrinal examinations ever be undertaken which precluded the element of essential agreement, a Basis of Union provision that has allowed for a breadth of diversity in our denomination that is unparalleled in the world.

She submitted that the decision of Toronto Conference to undertake a review of a minister's doctrinal beliefs in accordance with the ruling of the General Secretary but without the provision of essential agreement is a breach of the Basis of Union.

Ms. Vosper argued that any review of the effectiveness of a minister, especially reviews on theological grounds, the responsibility for which lies with the Session of a congregation, must allow for the full participation and input of that congregation and of the Presbytery responsible for the oversight of that congregation.

Ms. Vosper concluded by submitting that the use of the Conference Interview Committee as a Ministry Personnel Review Committee had led to procedural confusion and an inconsistent application of the procedures for the review of ministers, which have been set out to ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness.

Ms. Vosper's Closing

Ms. Vosper submitted that the use of a Conference Interview Committee to conduct a review of the theology of a minister illustrated two significant changes in the polity of the United Church for the oversight and discipline of ministers:

1. the shift of the oversight and discipline of ministers from the Presbytery to the Conference; and
2. the Ruling of the General Secretary that requires an ongoing affirmation of ordination questions by all ministers.

She argued that this new process is not open and fair and thus raises serious concerns. She challenged the Church to work together to better understand the implications of the new process for presbyteries, congregations, and ministers. She submitted that future processes will be developed and that the Church has both the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that they do so with transparency, accountability, and fairness.

Ms. Vosper concluded by inviting the Toronto Conference Interview Committee to decline to participate in a process that has, in her submission, no grounding in United Church polity, no precedent in United Church history, and no merit based on the ongoing and unbroken nature of the covenant that exists between Toronto Southeast Presbytery, West Hill United Church and Gretta Vosper.

Ms. Vosper asked the Conference Interview Committee to find that the way forward is not by using what she termed 'an aberrant disciplinary process', but rather through a collaborative effort to improve The United Church of Canada.

The members of the Conference Interview Committee declined Ms. Vosper's invitation not to participate in this review. The Committee knew that Ms. Vosper had appealed the Ruling of the General Secretary to the Judicial Committee of the General Council. The Committee had the decision of the Executive of the Judicial Committee, which declined to hear her appeal. We began from that decision.

Findings

Doctrine of The United Church of Canada

The doctrine of the United Church is set out in the Basis of Union and recognizes the primacy of scripture²⁶ and the following standards subordinate to scripture²⁷:

- the Twenty Articles of Doctrine as set out in sections 2.3.0 through 2.3.20 of the Basis of Union;²⁸
- A Statement of Faith, 1940, set out in sections 2.4.0 through 2.4.12;²⁹
- A New Creed, set out in section 2.5 of the Basis of Union;³⁰ and
- A Song of Faith, set out in section 2.6 of the Basis of Union.³¹

In these standards, our belief in God is described as:

- 1925 ... the one only living and true God, a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being and perfections; the Lord Almighty, who is love, mercy, full of compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. We worship Him in the unity of the godhead and the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons of the same substance, equal in power and glory.³²
- 1940 ... the eternal personal Spirit, Creator and Upholder of all things, ... sovereign Lord exalted above the world, orders and overrules all things in it to the accomplishment of His holy wise, and good purposes ... [who] made man to love and serve Him; that He cares for him as a righteous and compassionate Father; and nothing can either quench His love or finally defeat His gracious purpose for man... as Creator, Upholder and Sovereign Lord of all things, and the righteous and loving Father of men.³³
- 1968, revised in 1980, revised again in 1994 ... who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.³⁴

²⁶ Basis of Union, section 2.1

²⁷ Basis on Union, section 2.2

²⁸ Basis of Union, section 2.2.1

²⁹ Basis of Union, section 2.2.2

³⁰ Basis of Union, section 2.2.3

³¹ Basis of Union, section 2.2.4

³² Twenty Articles of Doctrine, Basis of Union, section 2.3.1

³³ A Statement of Faith, 1940, Basis of Union, section 2.4.1

³⁴ A New Creed, Basis of Union, section 2.5

- 2006 ... Is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description? Yet, in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship. So God creates the universe and with it the possibility of being and relating. God tends the universe, mending the broken and reconciling the estranged. God enlivens the universe, guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.... as one and triune: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ... as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer God, Christ, and Spirit Mother, Friend, and Comforter Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love, and in other ways that speak faithfully of the One on whom our hearts rely, the fully shared life at the heart of the universe. We witness to Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.³⁵

The words to describe God in the United Church have shifted from “...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons of the same substance, equal in power and glory” in 1925 to “Holy Mystery” in 2006 and will continue to change as we live out our commitment to walk in right relationship with Indigenous peoples.

The Committee assessed where Gretta Vosper fits in that continuum of faith.

Suitability of Rev. Gretta Vosper

This is a review of the effectiveness of the ministry of Rev. Gretta Vosper. We have read the written submissions, sent to the Committee by her lawyers, which Ms. Vosper has adopted. We have read the written submissions and materials from West Hill United Church. We have questioned and heard the answers Ms. Vosper gave on June 29, 2016.

The question the members of the Conference Interview Committee must answer is whether, in our opinion, Ms. Vosper is suitable to continue serving in ordered ministry in the United Church.

After prayer and much discussion, it was moved and seconded that Rev. Gretta Vosper is not suitable to continue serving in ordered ministry in The United Church of Canada. The vote was 19 in favour, 4 against, no abstentions.

Reasons of the Majority

In determining whether Ms. Vosper is suitable to continue serving as a minister in the United Church, we compared her answers on faith and theology to those statements of doctrine set out in the Basis of Union as the following illustrate.

³⁵ A Song of Faith, Basis of Union, section 2.6

God

The United Church is founded upon God. At its centre, our Church states:

We believe in God, who has created and is creating ... and who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust in God. ... God is with us. We are not alone.”³⁶

Ms. Vosper is very clear about what she does not believe. She stated that she does not believe in a Trinitarian God, a being who presides over earth from another realm, a supernatural being, who has the power to intervene in our world, a theistic God. She also does not believe in an absent God, a God of no substance, who exists beyond the universe, yet contains it. Ms. Vosper said that God is not a ‘who’, a being, an identity.

It was more challenging to understand what Ms. Vosper **does** believe. Ms. Vosper explained that she believes in love as the centre, the most sacred value. She also believes in truth and courage. Ms. Vosper said that her ministry rests on love, truth and courage, but that none of these characteristics come from God or originate in the Bible. She said that the unique element from Christianity is hope, the promise of something we cannot assure.

When asked whether love, truth and courage are God, she did not answer the question but responded that she had stopped using what she said is the archaic word ‘God’ in her ministry at West Hill because its use is a barrier to the participation of some in this congregation.

When pressed, Ms. Vosper said that by ‘god/God’ she means what is created between people in relationships. She said that it can’t be measured or described, but it is the power in relationships that is pure and strong. When questioned, she said that for her, God is nothing more than a construct between two people. She said that the construct has a power beyond us, but it does not exist separate from us; it is dependent upon us. Ms. Vosper never uses the word ‘god/God’ and said that the construct is not divine.

Jesus Christ

The United Church is a Christian Church whose centre includes the celebration of the life and work of Jesus, “the Word made flesh”.³⁷

³⁶ A New Creed, Basis of Union, section 2.5

³⁷ A New Creed, Basis of Union, section 2.5, at p. 20

A Song of Faith provides³⁸:

We find God made known in Jesus of Nazareth, and so we sing of God the Christ, the Holy One embodied.

We sing of Jesus, a Jew, born to a woman in poverty in a time of social upheaval and political oppression. He knew human joy and sorrow. So filled with the Holy Spirit was he that in him people experienced the presence of God among them ...

Jesus announced the coming of God's reign ...

He healed the sick and fed the hungry. He forgave sins and freed those held captive by all manner of demonic powers. He crossed barriers of race, class, culture, and gender. He preached and practiced unconditional love – love of God, love of neighbor, love of friend, love of enemy – and he commanded his followers to love one another as he had loved them ...

When asked who Jesus Christ was to her, Ms. Vosper responded that Jesus was a historical figure with healing skills, who lived more than two thousand years ago and the record of his life is spotty. She said that Jesus was an itinerant Middle Eastern preacher who managed to engage a group of people who were looking for the same thing. She does not see Jesus as divine. He was not the Son of God. Jesus is not her Saviour.

Ms. Vosper no longer calls herself a Christian.

Holy Spirit

A Song of Faith provides:³⁹

... we sing of God the Spirit, who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation, animating all energy and matter and moving in the human heart.

We sing of God the Spirit, faithful and untamable, who is creatively and redemptively active in the world.

The spirit challenges us to celebrate the holy not only in what is familiar, but also in what seems foreign.

We sing of the Spirit, who speaks our prayers of deepest longing and enfolds our concerns and confessions, transforming us and the world.

³⁸ Basis of Union, section 2.6, at page 24

³⁹ Basis of Union, section 2.6, at page 23

Ms. Vosper said that there is no such thing as the Holy Spirit, that it is a construct that grew up in the early church to deal with the various factions.

Scripture

The United Church recognizes the primacy of scripture.⁴⁰ Candidates for ordination are asked:⁴¹

- Do you believe that God is calling you to the ordained ministry of Word...?
and
- Are you willing to exercise your ministry in accordance with the scriptures...?

When Ms. Vosper was ordained at Bay of Quinte Conference, not only was she asked these questions, but she also answered, “I will” to the questions:

- Will you, with Christ’s people, be faithful in prayer and in the study of scripture, that you may know the mind of Christ?
and
- Will you endeavor to teach and preach the Word of God ...?

Today Ms. Vosper does not accept that the Bible is the primary source from which she draws wisdom for herself or others, nor does she accept that our ethical and moral choices are grounded in scripture. Instead, Ms. Vosper uses diverse resources from art, poetry, prose and literature, selecting them for their message of love, justice and compassion that will inform, inspire, edify, or convict the congregation, rather than by their source. In so doing, Ms. Vosper does not consider that she is engaged in a ministry of the Word and she does not accept a call to that ministry.

But the United Church of Canada sings:

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word, passed on from generation to generation to guide and inspire, that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place from the human experiences and cultural assumptions of another era. God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.⁴²

⁴⁰ Doctrine, Basis of Union, section 2.1

⁴¹ Vows for Ordination, Basis of Union, section 11.3

⁴² A Song of Faith, Basis of Union, section 2.6, at page 23

Worship, Prayer, and Sacraments

The United Church recognizes the important role worship plays in the life and work of the Church. A Song of Faith states:

We offer worship as an outpouring of gratitude and awe and as a practice of opening ourselves to God's still, small voice of comfort, to God's rushing whirlwind of challenge. Through word, music, art and sacrament, in community and in solitude, God changes our lives, our relationships, and our world.

We Sing with trust.⁴³

Ms. Vosper calls it 'gathering', not worship, a coming together to strengthen relationships, to strengthen love for each other, to inspire each other through music and readings and to be as whole and beautiful as possible.

She refers to prayer as 'community sharing', in which people express their particular concerns and the congregation responds, "May love abound."

She does not mention God at West Hill's gatherings and does not use sacred music.

Ms. Vosper does not perform baptism, but instead incorporates the characteristics or values the family wants in their child into a ritual that she has created. There is no baptismal certificate and Ms. Vosper tells the parents that the baptism will not be recognized by the World Council of Churches.

At West Hill, Ms. Vosper has replaced the sacrament of communion with a communal sharing of bread and food, a gathering around a table.

Ms. Vosper does not see herself engaged in the ministry of Sacraments. And, she said that she does not accept a call to such ministry.

What Ms. Vosper believes and practices today is very different from the doctrine of The United Church of Canada. Ms. Vosper has stripped worship, prayer, baptism and communion at West Hill of their continuity with the Church, their connection with scripture, and the presence of God.

Conclusions

Ms. Vosper explained that her beliefs, her theology have evolved from the time she was in Sunday School as a child, through her theological education and into her ministry. How she describes herself has also changed, from a non-theist to an

⁴³ A Song of Faith, Basis of Union, section 2.6, at page 23

atheist, and now, not as a Christian. Over that time, Ms. Vosper said that her theology has evolved beyond the doctrine of the United Church. When asked whether today she is in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of The United Church of Canada, Ms. Vosper chose not to answer.

The Committee read the submissions and listened very carefully to determine whether Ms. Vosper's beliefs are in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of the United Church. This is a crucial question asked of all potential ordinands to determine whether they are suitable for ministry within The United Church of Canada.

We have concluded that if Gretta Vosper were before us today, seeking to be ordained, the Toronto Conference Interview Committee would not recommend her. In our opinion, she is not suitable to continue in ordained ministry because she does not believe in God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Ms. Vosper does not recognize the primacy of scripture, she will not conduct the sacraments, and she is no longer in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of The United Church of Canada.

In reading her written submissions and in hearing her answers, we have concluded that Ms. Vosper is unwilling and unable to reaffirm her 1993 ordination vows or affirm the vows used across the Church as found in the Basis of Union section 11.3.

Although The United Church of Canada is a big tent, welcoming a diversity of theological beliefs, Ms. Vosper is so far from centre of what holds us together as a **united** church that we have concluded that she is not suitable to continue as an ordained minister in our Church.

Recommendations

The Committee is not recommending any form of remediation because Ms. Vosper has been so clear and unequivocal about her beliefs. The Committee concluded that remediation to enable Ms. Vosper to remain as an ordained minister in The United Church of Canada, would not be productive.

Therefore, the Conference Interview Committee recommends that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference request that the General Council conduct a formal hearing to consider whether to place the name of Rev. Gretta Vosper on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary).

The Committee also recommends that the Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference explore ways to provide support to Rev. Vosper and to West Hill United Church throughout the formal hearing process.

Reasons of those in Dissent

We disagree with the Majority and have concluded that Rev. Vosper is suitable and should continue in Ordered Ministry in The United Church of Canada.

When our Church was formed in 1925, its theology and doctrine were compromises from those of the founding three denominations. Ministers holding differing theologies were able to continue in the new Church if they were in essential agreement with the primacy of scripture and the Twenty Articles of Doctrine set out in the Basis of Union.⁴⁴

Just as the constitution of Canada is interpreted as a living tree, capable of growth and expansion within its natural limits,⁴⁵ the theology and doctrine of our Church have evolved since 1925 and it must continue to expand to meet the spiritual needs of Canadians. The United Church has never pretended that we got it **right** in 1925, or that further debate was unnecessary or unwelcome. Instead, in the tradition of Reformed communities throughout the world, the Church's formal beliefs have been expressed anew in each generation in ways that are both faithful to scripture and reflect the language and meaning of their time.⁴⁶

A Statement of Faith, 1940 uses substantially different words than the Twenty Articles of Doctrine, which were adopted fifteen years earlier. A New Creed, first adopted in 1968 and then subsequently revised in 1980 and 1994, contains further changes in the language to describe our doctrine. A Song of Faith, which was debated in congregations and presbyteries across Canada before it was adopted in 2006, thirty-eight years after A New Creed, is the most recent expression of our doctrine.

The words used to describe God: 'Holy Mystery', Jesus Christ: 'a Jew, born to a woman in poverty in a time of upheaval and political oppression', and God the Spirit: 'who from the beginning has swept over the face of creation animating all energy and matter and moving in the human heart' are markedly different from the words used in the Twenty Articles of Doctrine.

And the growth of our doctrine is not complete. As we live out our commitment to walk in right relations with our Indigenous communities of faith, we must include First Nations' spirituality into our theology, doctrine, and worship.

And the expansion of our understanding and acceptance will continue. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

⁴⁴ Basis of Union, section 2.3

⁴⁵ *Edwards v. Canada (Attorney General)*, [1930] A.C. 124; [1929] UKPC 86 (Privy Council) [The Persons Case]

⁴⁶ Preamble to 2012 Remit, A Song of Faith

When asked whether she continued to affirm the vows of ordination found in the Basis of Union, section 11.3, Ms. Vosper began by saying ‘if you meant a theist God’ and then responded that she did not believe in a divine supernatural being who acts in this world. In fact, many ministers and lay persons share Ms. Vosper’s belief in a non-theist God. She went on to describe God as what is created between us, the power in relationships that is pure and strong. For political reasons, Ms. Vosper began calling herself an atheist in 2013 in solidarity with Bangladeshi bloggers who were threatened by their government. She continues to use the term ‘atheist’ because she perceives that for many, the word ‘God’ is a barrier to participation in the life and work of the Church.

And in the latest expression of our doctrine, the United Church sings ‘God of Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description’.⁴⁷

Ms. Vosper states that her ministry is built on love, truth and courage and adds from our Christian heritage, hope, the promise of something we cannot assure. And we go on to sing:⁴⁸

Yet, in love the one eternal God seeks relationship.
So, God creates the universe and with it the possibility of being and relating.

We agree with the Majority that the theology of the United Church should be a big tent and, rather than defining the boundaries of that tent, to consider instead how far from the centre Ms. Vosper really is.

Many of Ms. Vosper’s theological positions, while not in the mainstream, are not unique amongst the ministers and lay persons of the United Church. This is demonstrated in part by the wide support she has received in letters to the editor of the Observer. She has opened up productive discussions about faith issues in our Church and beyond. The United Church has a history of welcoming theological diversity and, to find Ms. Vosper unsuitable could stifle exploration and stunt that diversity.

Ethos, rather than doctrine, has been the defining image of the United Church. In her written submissions and in answers to the questions, Ms. Vosper emphasized how the United Church has been instrumental in shaping her ethical stances, and how transmitting this ethical focus has been central to her ministry. Her congregation, West Hill, has welcomed this focus.

Ms. Vosper’s theological writings have been well received within the worldwide progressive Christianity movement and her book, *WITH OR WITHOUT GOD*, has been on the syllabus of theological schools. By presenting a faith with much of the

⁴⁷ A Song of Faith, Basis of Union, section 2.6

⁴⁸ A Song of Faith, Basis of Union, section 2.6

traditional structure removed, Ms. Vosper is appealing to those who are part of the 'spiritual but not religious' group who define their religion as 'none'. This is a growing and important community and she is known as a resource for those seeking to address the needs of the 'none' group.

Recognizing that the United Church has room for divergence of vision and leadership, those of us in dissent would have found that Rev. Gretta Vosper is suitable to continue as a minister in The United Church of Canada.

Dated at Toronto this 7th day of September 2016

On behalf of the members of the Conference Interview Committee

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela Lock". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Pamelia Lock
Vice Chair
Toronto Conference Interview Committee