

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
TORONTO CONFERENCE**

**Minutes of a meeting of the
Sub-Executive of Toronto Conference
Thursday, September 15, 2016,
Monday, September 19, 2016
and Wednesday, September 21, 2016**

The sub-Executive of Toronto Conference met at the Conference office on Thursday, September 15, 2016. The meeting began at 9:30 a.m. A quorum was present.

Present: Audrey Brown (President), David Allen (Executive Secretary), Bryan Ransom (Past-President), Sharon Aylsworth (Toronto Southeast), Eiko Hosaka (diversity representative), Angus MacLennan (Living Waters), Thérèse Samuel (Northern Waters), Catherine Smith (South West)

Corresponding members

Pam Lock and Diane Bennett-Jones (Conference Interview Committee); Gretta Vosper and her legal counsel Julian Falconer and Akousa Matthews; Randy Bowles, John DiPede, and Ruth Gill of West Hill United Church; Don Francis of Emmanuel United Church, Ottawa; Martha ter Kuile and Paul Hutchison (Toronto Southeast Presbytery); Beth Symes, legal counsel for Toronto Conference

Preparation for discussion of review

The sub-Executive met at approximately 9:30 a.m. to identify questions it wished to ask of the various parties who would be making presentations during the meeting.

Opening

At approximately 10:30 a.m. President Audrey Brown welcomed everyone, and called the meeting to order in the name of Jesus Christ. She acknowledged the land on which the meeting was taking place, offered prayer and asked people to introduce themselves. She acknowledged the presence of people in the gallery and members of the media and reminded gallery members that they were there as silent observers of the process.

Agenda

MOTION by Sharon Aylsworth/Bryan Ransom that the agenda consist of approval of corresponding members, and dealing with the review authorized on May 11, 2015 and reinstated on April 1, 2016.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Corresponding members

MOTION by Catherine Smith/Angus MacLennan that the corresponding members of this meeting be those making presentations regarding the review of the Rev. Greta Vosper and Beth Symes, legal counsel to Toronto Conference.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Receipt of report

MOTION by David Allen/Bryan Ransom that the sub-Executive receive the report (Appendix A) of the review of the Rev. Greta Vosper.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Correspondence

The Executive Secretary explained that three items of correspondence had been directed to the sub-Executive – e-mails from Rev. Dr. Harry Oussoren and Rev. Bill Wall, and a petition which had been circulating on Facebook.

MOTION by David Allen/Angus MacLennan that the correspondence (Appendix B) be received for information.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Discussion with Interview Committee representatives

Sub-Executive members had an opportunity to ask questions of the review team representatives Pam Lock and Diane Bennett-Jones. No questions were asked. The President thanked the representatives for the work of the committee.

Review – response from Greta Vosper

Greta Vosper and Julian Falconer provided a response (Appendix C) to the review report. Sub-Executive members asked questions through the President. The President thanked Ms. Vosper and Mr. Falconer for their presentation.

The President reminded members of the gallery that they were present as silent observers.

Review – response from West Hill United Church

Randy Bowles, John DiPede and Ruth Gill from West Hill United Church provided a response (Appendix D) to the review report. They also invited Don Francis from Emmanuel United Church in Ottawa to make a brief presentation. Sub-Executive

members asked questions through the President; the President thanked the West Hill representatives and Mr. Francis.

Review – response from Toronto Southeast Presbytery

Martha ter Kuile and Paul Hutchison from Toronto Southeast Presbytery provided a response (Appendix E) to the review report. Sub-Executive members asked questions through the President; the President thanked the presbytery representatives.

Mr. Falconer requested an opportunity to respond to the presentation from Toronto Southeast Presbytery. The President deferred a response until after a break.

Break

The sub-Executive retired from the meeting to determine whether there were additional questions to be asked of any of the parties.

Additional questions

The sub-Executive asked additional questions of Ms. Vosper and the representatives from Toronto Southeast Presbytery.

In his response to the presentation from the Toronto Southeast Presbytery representatives, Mr. Falconer made submissions and requested that additional correspondence be appended to the minutes of the meeting (Appendix F). Ms. Vosper delivered a closing statement.

Concluding matters

The Executive Secretary explained the decision-making process; the sub-Executive will advise Ms. Vosper in writing regarding the decisions of the sub-Executive.

Ms. Vosper and Mr. Falconer requested that the distribution of the decisions be handled in a different manner than the distribution of the report. Ms. Symes will confer with Mr. Falconer, Mr. Bowes and Mr. Hutchison about a process for releasing the decision.

The President offered a concluding prayer and all guests left the meeting.

Lunch

The sub-Executive broke for lunch at approximately 12:45 p.m. The Past-President offered grace, and the meeting resumed at 1:28 p.m.

Deliberations

The sub-Executive began the afternoon with prayer offered by the Past-President.

After making its finding that Ms. Vosper was not suitable to continue in ministry in The United Church of Canada, the Interview Committee made an observation and two 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.

The sub-Executive noted that the Interview Committee concluded that Ms. Vosper is not suitable to continue as an ordained minister in The United Church of Canada. The committee did not recommend any form of remediation because Ms. Vosper has been so clear and unequivocal about her beliefs.

The sub-Executive explored the options set out in J.9.4 of *The Manual*, and discussed various proposals that had been made during the presentations or in correspondence, e.g. putting the report on hold, having a debate, adjourning the decision of Toronto Conference for one year, stopping the process and taking no action, weighing the adverse costs to the church arising from a protracted process, and refusing to participate in the process.

Decisions

Having heard from Ms. Vosper and her legal counsel, and from representatives of West Hill United Church and Toronto Southeast Presbytery, and having heard responses to questions from the sub-Executive, the sub-Executive of Conference agreed with the Interview Committee's report that any forms of remediation would not be productive.

Toronto Conference has followed the process set out in the Ruling of the General Secretary dated May 5, 2015. The sub-Executive was not persuaded by the presentations, the responses to its questions or the correspondence or petition it received to go in a different direction than that which was recommended by the Interview Committee. If Ms. Vosper is not suitable to continue in ministry in the United Church, then she is entitled to a formal hearing in which it will be determined whether her ministry within the church should end.

The sub-Executive agreed that it would take additional time for reflection prior to making decisions.

Adjournment

MOTION by David Allen/Angus MacLennan that the sub-Executive reconvene by conference call at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, September 19, 2016.

MOTION

CARRIED.

The President expressed appreciation to members of the sub-Executive and the staff for their work to date. She offered a blessing. The meeting adjourned at 5:18 p.m.

Monday, September 19, 2016

Reconvening

The sub-Executive reconvened by conference call on Monday, September 19, 2016 beginning at 11:02 a.m. All members and Ms. Symes were present. The President offered prayer.

Correspondence

A further item of correspondence from Margaret Hetherington had been addressed to the sub-Executive and is included in the correspondence list in Appendix B for this meeting.

Decisions (cont'd)

Following further discussion, the sub-Executive made the following motion in response to the report from the Interview Committee plus what it had heard during the presentations on September 15, 2016.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Sharon Aylsworth that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference...

- a) request the General Council of The United Church of Canada to conduct a formal hearing to consider whether to place the name of the Rev. Gretta Vosper on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary);
- b) confirm that Ms. Vosper may remain in ministry at West Hill United Church, Toronto Southeast Presbytery, until the results of the formal hearing are known;
- c) confirm that until the results of the formal hearing are known, no call, appointment or transfer for Ms. Vosper will be approved by Toronto Conference;

- d) confirm that no further restrictions will be placed on Ms. Vosper's functioning at this time.

A member requested that the motion be considered *seriatim*.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Sharon Aylsworth that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference request the General Council of The United Church of Canada to conduct a formal hearing to consider whether to place the name of the Rev. Gretta Vosper on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary).

MOTION

CARRIED.

The Past-President offered prayer.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Sharon Aylsworth that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference confirm that the Rev. Gretta Vosper may remain in ministry at West Hill United Church, Toronto Southeast Presbytery, until the results of the formal hearing are known.

MOTION

CARRIED.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Sharon Aylsworth that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference confirm that until the results of the formal hearing are known, no call, appointment or transfer for the Rev. Gretta Vosper will be approved by Toronto Conference.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Break

The sub-Executive took a brief break.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Sharon Aylsworth that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference confirm that no further restrictions will be placed on the Rev. Gretta Vosper's functioning at this time.

MOTION

CARRIED.

All decisions were unanimous.

During their presentation, the representatives of Toronto Southeast Presbytery had indicated the presbytery's willingness to offer support during the formal hearing process and beyond.

MOTION by Thérèse Samuel/Eiko Hosaka that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference affirms the commitment of Toronto Southeast Presbytery to offer

support to the Rev. Gretta Vosper and West Hill United Church through prayer, support and assistance and by remaining in contact with the congregation.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Release of decision

Beth Symes outlined the process for releasing the sub-Executive's decision, as agreed by Gretta Vosper and her legal counsel, West Hill United Church and Toronto Southeast Presbytery.

Message to the church and the wider community

The sub-Executive began discussion of a message to be offered to the church and the wider community.

Adjournment

MOTION by David Allen/Bryan Ransom that the sub-Executive reconvene by conference call at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, September 21, 2016.

MOTION

CARRIED.

The President thanked everyone for the work done today and offered prayer. The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Wednesday, September 21, 2016

Reconvening

The sub-Executive reconvened by conference call on Wednesday, September 21, 2016 beginning at 9:02 a.m. All members and Ms. Symes were present. The President offered prayer.

The President asked members to confirm how they were feeling about the decisions made to date. The group was unanimous in its support for the motions which had been passed on September 19.

Message to the church and the wider community (cont'd)

The sub-Executive continued its work on a message to be released to the church and the wider community.

Ms. Symes left the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

The sub-Executive completed its work on a message to the church and the wider community.

MOTION by Bryan Ransom/Catherine Smith that the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference release a message (Appendix G) to the church and the wider community regarding the review of the Rev. Gretta Vosper and the decisions made by the sub-Executive in relation to the review.

MOTION

CARRIED.

Concluding matters

Prior to the September 21 session of the sub-Executive, another item of correspondence had been distributed to the sub-Executive from Rhonda Sanders and is included in the record of correspondence in Appendix B.

The Executive Secretary outlined the process for releasing the sub-Executive's decisions.

With the business completed, the President thanked the Executive Secretary and members of the sub-Executive for their time and energy on this review. She declared the meeting closed at 11:52 a.m. The Past-President offered a blessing.

Audrey Brown
President

David W. Allen
Executive Secretary