

Randy Bowes, Board Chair Of West Hill United, presentation to the Toronto Conference sub –Executive Meeting to review the recommendations of the Interview Committee’s ruling of Rev. Gretta Vosper’s unsuitability as a United Church minister.

Over 18 months ago we were informed that a formal review of Rev. Gretta Vosper was being initiated by Toronto Conference based on complaints received by Conference. To this day it remains unclear the eligibility of those complainants that could initiate such a review.

It was also confusing why such a review was needed NOW since the views of Rev. Gretta Vosper’s beliefs had been widely known to the United Church of Canada as a result of her publications and public interviews for some 15 years.

We were also informed that we would have to wait for a ruling from the General Secretary of the UCC on this matter, since there was no precedent on how to proceed with such a review. We believe the process that has been followed is significantly flawed but that is not a matter for today.

Since the beginning, and throughout the “effectiveness” review of Rev. Gretta Vosper, the congregation of West Hill United have requested and at times demanded the opportunity to have an engaging conversation with those involved in the deliberations by the different court levels of the United Church and, that the question of suitability of a UC minister based on a set of beliefs requires a much broader based dialogue within the UCC. With respect, we are at a point in the road where the decision by a few will forever shape the entire UCC.

So here we are today, and we finally have our opportunity, in the precious 15 minutes that we have been given, to be heard and to begin this important dialogue.

The interviewing committee by a vote of 19 to 4 have deemed Rev. Gretta Vosper unsuitable for ministry in the United Church. We the members of West Hill United Church and the United Church of Canada strongly disagree with the 19 panelists. At this time I wish to present some facts that counter the presumption of ineffectiveness and unsuitability of Rev Gretta Vosper. I say facts, because what you are about to hear are the true experiences and impacts from some of our members as a result of being part of the ministry of Rev Gretta Vosper and West Hill United Church.

I GIVE WITNESS read by John (reader 1) and Ruth (reader 2)

“THIS IS MY WITNESS”

Reader #1

- 1) Contrary to what you might think, not everyone at West Hill is of one mind. I do not see myself as an atheist. You may wonder then why I look to Gretta for leadership. Gretta’s description of what it means to create God *in the world* – which surely has to be the point of religion – speaks to me more powerfully *and beautifully* than anything I’ve ever heard from those calling themselves theists. With a little more imagination and a little less dogma, you would understand why. Please don’t force me out of the United Church. We do good work together and I still want to be part of it..

Reader #2

- 2) Gretta brought me into a church for the first time in decades. I finally found an environment which focused on being the best person I could be without having to agree to a creed which no longer is relevant to me. I must stress too that traditional believers of any faith are welcome at West Hill. Although we include atheists of different outlooks, we reach out to everyone who is comfortable with our values. West Hill is life-affirming in a way that traditional religions are often not.

Reader #1

- 3) It took just one service with Gretta to change me into a regular church goer, after an absence of more than fifty years. I feel enriched, inspired, challenged, committed, grateful, simply because West Hill United is so much more than just a “regular” church. Finally, I’ve found a place where I belong.

Reader #2

- 4) Gretta inspires me to want to go to church. Every time I attend, I am spiritually enriched, my faith-cup re-filled, my confidence to intentionally make our world a better place, is boosted. In short, Gretta and West Hill achieve what every Christian church aspires to. As long as Gretta remains the minister at West Hill, effectively preaching the most meaningful spirituality that I have ever experienced, our family will continue to be strong supporters of the United Church of Canada.

Reader #1

- 5) I have attended a few churches in my lifetime and I find Gretta to be a very suitable and effective minister. It's all about LOVE. If we had more love in the world and less "it's my way or the highway" opinions, it might be a better world. I find Gretta to be a breath of fresh air. I wouldn't attend any other church. She is a pillar of strength!

Reader #2

- 6) I have spent some time with a different congregation recently. This congregation has a much more doctrinal approach, and it feels completely incompatible with my approach to spiritual life. I wouldn't ever seek spiritual help from this congregation or its pastor, their approach just doesn't fit with who I am.

I feel comfortable being vulnerable with gretta and the West Hill Community. A place where I can be who I truly am without having to believe or express my faith in a certain way. This is indeed a valuable thing for me and many others.

Reader #1

- 7) Gretta's voice is THE VOICE OF COMPASSION. Compassion is the basic element of all religions and MUST NEVER BE SILENCED

Reader #2

- 8) Our journey with Gretta has opened our minds and hearts to a new and better understanding of what church life can be without the stigma and dogma that constantly confuses and contradicts.

She has brought the true meaning of compassion hope and Love throughout.

Reader #1

- 9) West Hill is a loving community whose spirituality – connectedness of spirit – is as tangible to me as in any faith-based church.

Reader #2

- 10) The ministry of West Hill has had a profound effect on me in many ways:

It has allowed me to remain, with integrity and good conscience in the United Church of Canada. It has been a model for me of a church where love and compassion trumps theology. Its minister, Gretta Vosper, is for me, a shining light in the darkness of traditional church conformity and self-preservation.

It has shown me how compassion, openness, diversity and welcome are so much more meaningful and transformative.

Reader #1

- 11) Community and the building of community requires us all to reach more deeply into our compassion, understanding and helping each other. This is the modus operandi at West Hill United. Compassion cannot be “done” by rote.

For me, at West Hill – show up, be there, participate, do the best you can, encourage others, embrace the differences and love it all!!

Reader #2

- 12) We the congregation, have a very deep spirituality we believe in. If you must, call it god – only we spell it L-O- V- E. Gretta has helped me to become a more caring person, being more thoughtful of others around me, as well as the well-being of our planet. Please open your eyes and see the good that is happening at West Hill.

Reader #1

- 13) I have found at “West Hill” the community of loving individuals and thought provoking Pastor I have sought all my life. I am at peace at West Hill. Please do not destroy this community.

Reader #2

- 14) I grew up in the United Church of Canada where my interest has been in Outreach to the community and world at large. However in joining West Hill United 8 years ago my understanding of outreach and justice issues has been broadened beyond imagination. With Gretta's leadership we not only educate ourselves on the issues of the day, we become actively involved recognizing that we are all interconnected in the web of life. At West Hill we continually challenge ourselves to live our lives based upon our stated values of today's world with love being at the heart of it all, rather than on a theological base from the past. Quote - "We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth. We are members one of another; so that you cannot injure or help your neighbour without injuring or helping yourself." George Bernard Shaw

Reader #1

15) Gretta and West Hill have allowed me to grow and develop in ways that I never thought possible. I've been shown how to embrace the wonder, awe and mysteries of this world. I've learned the importance of developing right relationships with myself others and this planet. My want has always been to find that place where my gifts and the needs of the world intersect. West Hill has been my compass on this journey.

Respectful dialogue is a cornerstone of how we interact with one another at West Hill. Wishing this value were more widely embraced.

Don Francis spoke (comments not recorded)

[Randy]Again, please consider the real life impact that Rev Gretta Vosper's ministry has and continues to have on a community that hold's the full spectrum of beliefs, when making your difficult decisions.

Rev David Allen has commented in the press that we have the opportunity today to influence the decision of the Toronto Conference sub-Executive. We have a large contingent from West Hill here today so.....What do you want to hear from us that will help you set aside the interviewing committee's recommendations. (There was no response just silence)

In conclusion.....

We are asking that you recognize West Hill United Church as an effective ministry within Toronto Conference and by doing so recognize Rev. Gretta Vosper as an effective minister.

We are also requesting a deferral of your recommendations until there is a broader dialogue with the United Church of Canada, respecting the call by the growing number of United Church clergy and members from across Canada who have indicated support for dialogue and inclusion by way of the petition initiated by Southminster-Steinhauer United Church that was presented to the sub-executive committee yesterday. At the time of publication last night there were 600 signatures, we currently stand at of 740.

In short, we are seeking DIALOGUE, not DISCIPLINE.

We understand that the journey to this point, in this difficult process has been long and challenging for all involved and that you are faced with some difficult decisions, You can and will make a difference.....**In this your time of need.....May Love abound(response by attending West Hill members).**

We celebrate the diversity and inclusiveness of our proud United Church of Canada.....**In this abundant blessing.....We share the joy(response by attending West Hill members)**

Thank you

