

**A Message from the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference
Regarding the review of the Rev. Gretta Vosper**

Background: On Thursday, September 15, 2016, the sub-Executive of Toronto Conference met to receive a report of the review of the Rev. Gretta Vosper and to consider the recommendations contained in the report.

The report from the Conference 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 report states:

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.

On September 15, the sub-Executive heard from Ms. Vosper and her legal counsel, from representatives of West Hill United Church, and from representatives of Toronto Southeast Presbytery. They made presentations and responded to questions from the sub-Executive.

Deliberations and decision-making: The sub-Executive explored the remedial options set out in Section J.9.4 of *The Manual* (e.g. ordering a directed program, requiring a psychological examination, dissolving the pastoral relationship, suspension from ministry, etc.) 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.

If a minister is found not to be suitable to continue in ministry in the United Church, then he or she is entitled to a formal hearing in which it will be determined whether his or her ministry within the church should end.

After a second day of deliberations, the following four motions were passed regarding Ms. Vosper:

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);

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;

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;

Confirm that no further restrictions will be placed on Ms. Vosper's functioning at this time.

Impact of the decision: The decision to request a formal hearing does not presume that Ms. Vosper's name will be placed on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary). That decision will be made by the formal hearing panel.

Having said that, the sub-Executive recognizes that this is not the decision that some people had wanted. Some will be disappointed and angry that this action has been taken, believing that the United Church may be turning its back on a history of openness and inclusivity. Others have been frustrated that the United Church has allowed someone to be a minister in a Christian church while disavowing the major aspects of the Christian faith.

There is no unanimity in the church about what to do. The sub-Executive received correspondence and a petition urging the church to take no action, and was aware that others wanted the church to act. A number of observers from West Hill United Church and other places were present on September 15. E-mails and phone calls came in saying that the sub-Executive was being held in prayer, no matter what the outcome.

The debate about Ms. Vosper and her statements has been a catalyst for much discussion within the United Church and in places outside the church.

The sub-Executive laments the division that has occurred amongst people within the church, and is saddened by the vitriol that has been directed by some at Ms. Vosper and West Hill United Church, and at Toronto Conference for engaging a process to properly investigate concerns that had been raised. The sub-Executive hopes for respectful discussion that allows people to explore and share their own faith and to hear from others.

The way forward is costly in terms of emotional and spiritual energy. The way forward is costly in terms of time and finances for both Ms. Vosper and the church. At the same time, the sub-Executive moved forward believing that a clear answer was required.

The report from the Interview Committee is clear that the doctrine of the United Church has never been a static thing. The sub-Executive affirms that there has always been evolution in how the church describes what it believes. The United Church has experienced the delight of seeing God and our faith in a new light depending on the context in which we were living. There have been times we have said things that have caused joy in the church and the wider community. We've also over the years come to realize that some of the ways we have said things and the ways we have acted have been cause for

regret, sorrow, and repentance. But whether we have stated things in good, bad, or evolving ways, there has been the constant that the church believes in God, follows the way of Jesus Christ, and is led by the Spirit.

The sub-Executive calls on the church to show loving kindness to everyone, irrespective of belief or no belief. It asks for prayers for those who are angry, confused, or worried about the impact of this decision. And it calls on all of us to consider ways in which our current actions and expressions of our faith may put up barriers for those who are seeking a new or renewed commitment to a life of faith within the Christian tradition.

The sub-Executive calls on the church to continue the theological conversations that have taken place since long before The United Church of Canada was formed.

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