



ST. ANDREW'S-WESLEY
UNITED CHURCH

Dear Friends,

Once again the United Church is in the news. This is not always a good thing. Recent news reports have raised legitimate questions, which is why I wanted to write to you.

Greta Vosper is a minister in the United Church. Kind of. There are things she does that any clergy person in the United Church would do: she serves a United Church congregation, hers happens to be outside of Toronto. She leads worship services and preaches, teaches adult education classes and offers pastoral care, weddings and memorial services, and of course attends meetings.

I say she's "kind-of" a minister because, from what I can gather, she no longer has what is generally understood to be a "calling." That "call" might be an inner prompting or a tug of the heart or a nudging of the soul. A person steps into the vocation of ministry as a response to a "call" from God. But there's the catch: Greta Vosper no longer believes in God. So there are other things which clergy do, such as offer communion and baptize in the Spirit of God and, well, use the word "God" in worship and prayers which Greta does not do.

There are also things Greta Vosper does that most United Church clergy don't do, such as write books and speak publicly about being an atheist. Odd? You bet. Wrong (as in inconsistent with the vocation of service to a Christian Church)? Many think so.

As you can imagine, this has led to a conversation. More accurately, it's led to a thousand conversations. Many left the church Greta serves; those who remain solidly support her right to articulate her faith as she does. The Presbytery and Conference have encouraged her to step away from serving as a minister in the

United Church. She refuses. Negotiations have ensued; church courts have met; threats of law suits for wrongful dismissal hang in the air. She remains.

More can be said, of course, but at this juncture I want you to know the following:

- Our ministerial staff do not support an atheist who wants to serve as ordained clergy in the United Church of Canada. Sure, there are people in the pews who identify as atheist, but choosing to be an atheist who attends church and choosing to be an atheist who serves in the ministry are two very different things. The latter simply does not compute.
- Speaking personally, I believe that if Greta Vosper had any integrity and respect for the Church she so adamantly serves, she would leave the denomination. If she still felt pulled to serve a congregation, then she could apply to be recognized by the Unitarian Universalist denomination. She would be right at home with that faith community and could spare herself (and others) enormous amounts of time and money fighting to be an atheist in an explicitly Christian denomination.

Because a few of you have asked questions, we had hoped to offer an educational session on, briefly, church process (to address the question, "How could this happen?") and a brief theological overview to clarify the distinctions between Atheism, Supernatural Theism, Panentheism, and Agnosticism. Unfortunately, with the Salons still being renovated, we won't have the space to have that conversation this Sunday or next. So December 9th we'll have an opportunity to review process and provide a brief theological overview for any interested.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Chambers", written over a light-colored rectangular background.

Rev. Dan Chambers
Lead Minister, St. Andrew's Wesley United Church

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