

Calvin professor leaves over worship rules: Faculty required to belong to Christian Reformed congregation

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A Calvin College assistant professor who was denied an exemption from school policy that requires faculty to belong to the Christian Reformed Church said she is leaving for a teaching position in California.

Calvin officials said a deal was in the works that would have allowed Denise Isom to stay at the university in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and maintain dual membership in her Baptist church and a CRC congregation.

"I think we made a reasonable proposal that would have worked for both of us," Calvin president Gaylen Byker said. "I wish she had accepted that. If she makes another decision, that's her right."

After being denied an exemption last fall, Isom said she reviewed a draft of the proposal in January but had reservations. While considering it, she accepted an offer from Cal Poly University in San Luis Obispo to teach ethnic studies, she said.

"I was very disappointed and in some ways alarmed by what was being suggested I do," said Isom, an African-American assistant professor who specialized in race and education.

The agreement called for her to meet regularly with a CRC pastor about the Reformed tradition, and for a CRC pastor and her pastor at Messiah Missionary Baptist Church to report to Calvin on her progress, Isom said. She felt there would be "someone watching my presence [in church] and reporting on it," she added.

The *Grand Rapids Press* noted that two other professors were leaving over the issue. Susan Hasseler, associate dean of the education department, took a post as a dean at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, saying Calvin should have made an exception for Isom. "It is essential to the Reformed mission of Calvin College to do everything

possible to keep committed Christian scholars of color like Denise. She is truly irreplaceable.”

An assistant professor, Rachel Reed, said she was resigning in protest though she had not found another job. “To stay would send the message that I think it’s OK to treat people this way,” she told the newspaper.