

Matthew Becker, pastor and theologian, ousted from LCMS

by [Lilly Fowler](#) in the [August 19, 2015](#) issue

Matthew Becker, 52, an outspoken pastor and professor of theology, has been ousted from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. He remains on the faculty at Valparaiso University, an independent Lutheran school in Indiana.

Becker had raised questions about the Missouri Synod’s stance against the ordination of women, as well as its teaching of creationism. Members of the church had filed charges against him, triggering several years-long investigations. Church panels handling the investigations had cleared Becker.

“What was supposed to be ‘final,’ however, turned out not to be ‘final,’” Becker wrote on his blog.

In April an LCMS district president in Montana filed a charge against Becker for failing to maintain that Genesis represents a historical record. Soon after, another church official asked Becker to resign.

“I believe that for me to resign would go against my ordination vows and undermine the principles I have sought to defend in each of the cases against me,” Becker wrote in July.

Matthew Harrison, president of the 2.3-million-member denomination, who is up for reelection next summer, had rejected the decision of the panel that decided against initiating a process to expel Becker and spoke against Becker, including in a widely circulated Facebook post. Harrison wrote in January that “if my synod does not change its inability to call such a person to repentance and remove such a teacher where there is no repentance, then we are liars and our confession is meaningless.”

While many agreed with Harrison, others argued that Becker had the right to question church teachings on women’s ordination.

“It seems now we can’t even talk about it,” said Robert Hartwell, senior pastor at Village Lutheran Church in Bronxville, New York. “That’s what makes this so scary. We’re not even following our own system.”

In February, numerous pastors and members signed an open letter saying that they were “extremely offended” by Harrison’s action with regard to Becker.

Becker noted his long lineage of family members active in the LCMS, the denomination in which he was raised. He had doubts about remaining in the church but said he hoped that as a member he could help reform the synod. But by the late 1990s, he was attracting attention by speaking out publicly about the ordination of women, including saying that there’s no clear prohibition of it in scripture.

“I feel like many people who are my opponents are making an idol out of the LCMS,” Becker said. “It’s almost as if the church cannot make mistakes. I’ve always taken the view that nothing should be off the table.”

While Becker has tenure and the expulsion will not halt his theological work, including writing and editing, he wrote in an e-mail to the *Century* that he would not be able to teach theology at LCMS schools.

“I am now ineligible to preach and administer the sacraments in most LCMS congregations,” Becker noted. “This consequence is painful and sad for me and many parishioners” in the congregations where he has served as a pastor, preacher, and teacher.

Becker wrote that he and his family plan to join a congregation that is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and that he will also seek to be rostered as a pastor in the ELCA.

“I am shaking the dust off my worn sandals and moving on,” Becker wrote on his blog. “I am also at peace. I have a clean conscience.” —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; added sources

*This article was edited on August 4, 2015.*