

Gay Brethren cleric leaving for UCC: Matthew Smucker's ordination invalidated

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A minister in the Church of the Brethren whose ordination was invalidated because he is openly gay said he will leave the denomination and be ordained in the United Church of Christ. Matthew Smucker of Kalamazoo, Michigan, said he is “physically drained” by the controversy involved in being the first openly gay minister in the 135,000-member church.

“I don’t feel the call to stand in the middle anymore,” he said in a church news release. “In this case, it’s too personal. It’s affected lots of parts of my life in ways I don’t want to repeat.”

Smucker was ordained in June 2002 at his home church after he was certified by a statewide church body. The national church voted last year, however, not to “recognize” the ordination of any minister who is “known to be engaging in homosexual practices,” which invalidated Smucker’s ordination.

Smucker serves as the director of developmental operations at Chicago Theological Seminary, which is affiliated with the United Church of Christ. He said he will seek ordination from that denomination, which ordained its first openly gay pastor in 1972.

“We’re just deeply saddened and regret that Matt’s gifts can’t be released for ministry in the Church of the Brethren,” said Debbie Eisenbise, pastor of Smucker’s Skyridge Church of the Brethren in Kalamazoo. *-Religion News Service*