

Calvin Seminary's first female professor quits, charging bias: Calls her experience a nightmare

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Six years after her groundbreaking appointment, the first full-time female professor at Calvin Theological Seminary has resigned, alleging sex discrimination at the Christian Reformed Church school for ministers.

Ruth Tucker did not return to the Grand Rapids, Michigan, campus when classes began last month, charging that she was “excluded and sidelined” by seminary administrators.

“I was being held to a different standard than my male colleagues,” Tucker, 61, said. “I do not believe that, had I been an insider and a man, this ever would have happened to me.”

In a lengthy, hard-hitting account on her Web site, Tucker, who taught missions and church history at Calvin, calls her experience a “nightmare” and accuses administrators of covering up her appeals of a demotion three years ago. “I hope that by telling my story no one else will ever have to endure such a painful ordeal as I have and that positive changes will come to the school,” Tucker writes.

Though unwilling to go into details, seminary officials deny that Tucker suffered discrimination at the seminary.

“I believe that Professor Tucker as our first woman faculty member was really important to Calvin Theological Seminary, and we continue to be intent on using the gifts of women,” said Cornelius Plantinga Jr., president of the 300-student seminary.

Ruth Hofman, secretary for the seminary’s board of trustees and the first woman ordained a minister in the denomination, sympathized with Tucker’s complaints. “Dr. Ruth Tucker’s grievances are real, and I understand them instinctively,” Hofman said in an e-mail.

Tucker was appointed in 2000 by the denomination's synod as part of an effort to diversify the seminary's all-male faculty after the denomination opened some church pulpits to women. Since her hiring, one other woman has been added to the full-time faculty of 28, and two women teach part-time.

Tucker said on the Web site that she did well among the "tightly knit cadre of Dutch men" until Plantinga became president in 2002. *-Religion News Service*