

Ministry Testimonials: **Equipping God's People for Flourishing, Missional Lives in Christ through Scholarship, Teaching Theology, & Spiritual Direction**

Writing & Teaching Theology: Scholars

It was my privilege and pleasure to work with and learn from Lisa as a colleague in Trinity's Systematic Theology department for nine years. That she was invited to teach at a Roman Catholic seminary is apt testimony to her winsome and mature witness to the gospel. Her particular areas of expertise include theological anthropology – including issues not only of race and ethnicity but culture in general, including globalization – and sanctification/spiritual formation. What I particularly appreciate about Lisa's work is her ability to keep biblical and systematic theology in the driver's seat, yet to have other disciplines like anthropology and sociology as passengers in the car. Lisa has distinguished herself as knowledgeable in these areas: she was at the top of my list to write the crucial essay on "Culture and Hermeneutics" for the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (2005). It remains a valuable article years later. She is now writing the theological anthropology volume for the "Foundations of Evangelical Theology" series under contract with Crossway.

Dr. Kevin Vanhoozer, *Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

Lisa has taught an impressive array of biblical and theological courses, and continually researches new areas to expand her teaching and scholarly endeavors. At my urging, she taught a course addressing philosophical and theological views of personhood, related to her excellent work on theological anthropology. Student feedback was stellar. I also had the pleasure of observing her teach another seminar, and was impressed by the way she blended presentation, discussion and use of multiple technologies in a way that made for an excellent learning environment. She has an exceptional ability to invite her students to think through theological ideas with her, even when she is doing the presenting, such that they end up feeling they have developed their own understanding of the material rather than simply being handed a pile of information (as so often happens when professors spend at least part of their class time lecturing). Students then become active participants when opportunities arise to discuss the material and refine their understanding of it.

Lisa's grasp of the field of theology is well illustrated by her impressive scholarly work. She has been working on two very significant books on theological anthropology in recent years; one was under contract with Crossway from the outset.

Dr. John Kilner, *Professor of Bioethics & Contemporary Culture, Forman Chair of Biology & Ethics, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

It may seem odd that the largest Catholic seminary in the United States would invite an Evangelical Protestant theologian to join its faculty for two years. Timing is important. Pope Francis challenged Catholics to commemorate the Reformation, in all of its depth and nuance, as a way forward in the work of Christian unity. This was one of the reasons that Dr. Sung was appointed to the Chester & Mary Paluch Chair (Mundelein's endowed research professorship for visiting scholars) in 2017: to engage the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The other was her extensive research on racism. No one can deny that racism remains one of the critical issues which religious leaders must face today. Her wealth of knowledge about the field allowed her to bring a valuable contribution to Mundelein Seminary.

The Paluch Professor enriches the Mundelein community with perspectives outside of our regular faculty's expertise. In a series of public lectures, Dr. Sung shared with us her methodology as a systematic theologian in the Reformed Tradition, of bringing deep biblical exegesis into dialogue with social science research. This theology, viewed through the lens of a high view of the scriptures' authority and a high Christology, brings with it a confidence about using the findings of social science as a source for theological reflection. Her lectures are published in the *Chicago Studies* journal. <http://chicagostudies.usml.edu/>

Dr. Sung offered elective courses in Mundelein Seminary, co-taught the Reformation history course in the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, and led a seminar on theology and social science for the Graduate School's Doctor of Ministry program. The University of St. Mary of the Lake community is grateful to have had Dr. Sung with us as a visiting professor, and to have gained much from her scholarship on the Reformation, on racism and on theological anthropology.

The Very Rev. Thomas Baima, *STD, Provost, Univ. of St. Mary of the Lake; Professor of Dogmatic Theology, Mundelein Seminary*

Campus Ministry Director

As a woman called into full-time ministry, I have been deeply blessed by the ministry and friendship of Dr. Lisa Sung through the many years I have known her as a friend, colleague, and ministry partner.

Hearing Lisa's foundational teaching on women in the Scriptures when I was a young campus staff-worker shaped my own leadership calling and my passion around helping other women leaders to wrestle with biblical teaching. Lisa has also helped me to think about the intersections between gender and race and their impact on people. Her writing and teaching on culture, race and ethnicity for the InterVarsity-USA movement have helped me to grow in understanding how these realities influence our grasp of Scripture, our faith journeys, and our ministry and outreach.

I'm also profoundly grateful for Lisa's passion to shape not only the academic lives of seminarians but their spiritual lives also, so that they are integrating their personal faith and practice as they are being formed intellectually.

Ms. Melodie Marske, *MA Religion, Midwest Regional Director, Graduate & Faculty Ministries, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship*

Teaching Systematic Theology & Spiritual Formation: *Seminary Alumni*

Theological Anthropology Course (Mundelein Seminary)

For the academic-research component of my Sabbatical, I took the course “Race, Racism, Christian Identity & Ministry.” I am indebted to our professor, Dr. Lisa Sung. Her Christian faith, coupled with her exegetical skills with scripture, sociological scholarship, and mentoring contributed immensely to my grasp of the historical and contemporary nature of race and racism. Learning how to join others in dismantling personal and institutional racism has equipped me for post-sabbatical ministry.

Rev. Eugene Dyer, M.Div, Archdiocese of Chicago

Sanctification & Spiritual Formation Course *PLUS Group Spiritual Direction* (TEDS)

I treasure the Systematic Theology courses I took from Dr. Sung. Her teaching (especially “Models of Sanctification”) and the Spiritual Formation Covenant Group she led have had a powerful influence on my life and thinking. They exposed me to other writers and prayer practices, and challenged me to move beyond the familiar Bible study / small group / prayer models.

Churches vary widely in their ability to teach spiritual formation. In my experience, most focus on evangelism and grounding new believers in biblical truth, doing an admirable job. But for those wanting to go deeper, who’ve been Christians for years, the resources are rarely available. It’s crucial for Church leaders, lay and paid, to invest in spiritual growth. Theological knowledge is important, but so is spiritual development. We need to know how to continue to grow and maintain our spiritual health; spiritual formation provides these tools. God will lead us to deeper levels of spiritual development and faith, but we need to know these exist, and have guides along the way. Dr. Sung’s Spiritual Formation group prepared me to talk about this, and to push people to think outside the box and step into unknown territory, trusting God to meet them there.

I’m thankful for Dr. Sung’s influence as a professor and a woman devoted to following Christ through whatever life throws her way. I can’t wait to read her forthcoming books!

Ms. Kim Karpeles, MA Sys Theology, MA Chr. Studies, Director of Communication, The Village Presbyterian Church of Northbrook
As a TEDS MDiv student, many of my questions weren’t answered until I took Dr. Sung’s “Models of Sanctification” course. I also can’t stress enough how deeply her Spiritual Formation Covenant Group has impacted my life and many others’. Regular “Formation Groups” gave good social support but didn’t tap into the spiritual aspect of our faith. There is an element of our relationship with God that goes beyond the intellectual. In **group spiritual direction**, led by Dr. Sung, it was so helpful to be walked through how to practice spiritual disciplines and to witness how each person is spoken to and affected by God’s Word and Spirit. If one is walking well with God, one will find His peace even amid great challenges and stress. Knowing how to walk with God better than before – there is no price tag for that.

As an ordained Baptist pastor, many (especially church people) have come to me with the worst of all kinds of evils in their past, extreme anxieties and fears, and areas of deep darkness and hopelessness. I’ve referred many to counseling, but the Spiritual Formation concepts and training are almost always the only thing that helps them to any great and lasting degree. I’ve seen people come from great darkness into the light, and the power of God revealed, in very real and enduring ways. ...

The Church has ignored Spiritual Formation to its great detriment. Non-believers want to be *shown* the power of God and the victory that the Scriptures speak of – not just be *preached at*. Spiritual Formation does exactly that. When people see Christians who have the peace of God in them and the Holy Spirit transforming them into Jesus’ likeness, then they are willing to hear what we have to say. They listen because they see it is real, not just a theory. Both non-Christians and many Christians are searching for relief from the darkness. Unfortunately, many have tried church and found it to be without power or an ability to really help them. This is where we are losing people, more than anywhere else. Spiritual Formation is what they are lacking.

As a pastor, I see the Church’s extreme need for Spiritual Formation in all areas; there is no other answer. It is crucial for people who understand and practice it themselves to teach others about this invaluable resource which was always meant to be an essential part of our faith. Spiritual Formation is a huge key for the future church to be able to meet our world where it is.

Rev. Derek Mason, MDiv, Pastor; Founder, Identity in Christ, Inc.

Spiritual Direction for Individuals and Groups: Teaching, Guidance & Discernment

Personal Spiritual Direction

My family has known Lisa for many years, and for me personally, she has become a dear friend, mentor, and adoptive aunt. When I think of Lisa, three qualities stand out. Firstly, she is a caring, intentional listener: I always feel safe and respected when I talk with her, and she has a warm, welcoming heart. Secondly, Lisa listens to and converses with the Spirit – a beautiful example as I grow in my relationship with God and understanding of prayer. Thirdly, Lisa exemplifies an active, thoughtful integration of theology with the art of spiritual direction. Recently I was struggling to find direction in my life, so I met with her. She made me feel comfortable immediately, and allowed me to process what I was thinking and feeling without making me feel like I was on the clock. Her responses were deeply insightful: she helped me realize that while I thought I knew myself well, there’s still more to learn, and working toward self-knowledge can help me make better, wiser choices. She also put self-knowledge in the context of God’s knowledge of who he made me to be, and couched the whole conversation in Gospel truth, not simply focusing on me and the problems. Lisa continues to pray for me, share more theological and spiritual insights and resources with me, and encourage me in the progress I’ve made. I’m deeply grateful for her investment in me and my spiritual growth.

Dr. Mary Vanhoozer Rodriguez, Concert Pianist, Professional Musician

Church Group Retreat Speaker & Leader – First Presbyterian Church of River Forest (below)



First Presbyterian Church RIVER FOREST

I am a pastor for the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church of River Forest. We are a church family with about 300 active members. Every other year we seek to have a Women's Retreat to encourage our women to get away, meet new friends, and grow in their faith journeys.

In April of 2018, we had a one-day retreat on the campus of Mundelein Seminary (with the facilities and meals arranged with the Conference Center). Dr. Lisa Sung, a friend to many in our congregation from the years she was a church member living in the area, was our Retreat speaker and leader.

About 40 women attended. We had a diverse group of women in terms of backgrounds, life-stages, and spiritual depth and experiences with personal formation disciplines. We were grateful for Lisa's expertise and for her intentionality about balancing content with practice, seriousness with laughter, and leadership with humility. I believe the Holy Spirit was present and anointed the time.

The flow of the day was beautiful. We began the morning in corporate worship. Over the course of the day, we had three sessions on spiritual formation practices, led by Lisa: *Lectio Divina*, Centering Prayer, and *Examen*. Lisa did a wonderful job of planning and leading the sessions, creating a retreat booklet and worship resources, and balancing the teaching and content with guiding our group in hands-on exercises of each practice.

We took some time between sessions two (Centering Prayer) and three (*Examen*) for personal devotions in solitude and silence, followed by a period of free time for people to spend as desired (we encouraged them to enjoy the natural beauty of the campus, walk around the lake, engage in art and craft-making, take a nap, etc.). Also during the free time, Lisa, a church elder, and I made ourselves available for appointments for pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, prayer, and even shoulder massages to those women who were in need.

We ended the day with corporate worship after dinner, which included a time for sharing, communal prayer and singing, Communion, and a walk to the lakefront, where we had our benediction. It was a lovely, Spirit-filled day where each of the women, including myself, was gifted with what we needed: teaching or fellowship or communion or growth in their devotional prayer practices. Many of our women said it was the best spiritually-focused retreat they have attended.

We are grateful for Lisa's mastery of theology and spiritual formation, as well as for her tender spiritual intuition with our people, and her friendship over the years.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Allison Lundeen, Parish Associate

Reflections on Dr. Elizabeth Sung - Retreat Speaker
“Refresh” Women’s Retreat (April 29, 2018)
First Presbyterian Church of River Forest

As the Parish Associate pastor and I (a church elder) organized and planned for our one-day Women’s Retreat at the Conference Center of the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois, we realized that the women of our congregation were often rushed, frazzled, and so busy that they didn’t have—or felt they couldn’t take—time for spiritual rest and reflection. We wanted to provide an opportunity for them to quiet their minds, bodies and souls. We choose St. Mary’s because of the natural beauty of its surroundings and because Dr. Lisa Sung was available to lead our retreat there.

Our focus was on providing a time of rest, relaxation and focus on the Lord through practicing spiritual disciplines. Lisa has extensively studied and taught, and actively practices, many of these disciplines. She is a gifted teacher, and she showed deep empathy and compassion for the women. She is also a talented pianist and worship leader and we enjoyed her heartfelt ability to lead us to seek the Lord and praise him through worship songs and prayer.

Lisa led our group of 40 women through a time of learning about the call to come to Jesus with our attention and commitment, to listen, to be still, to experience our relationship with focus in deeper ways. She introduced and guided us in practicing several disciplines, which were also compiled in a booklet for us to use that day as well as take home as an aid in future practice. They included *Lectio Divina*, Centering Prayer and Examen. We also focused on the love God has for us, how we are precious to him, and how he longs for us to come to him, accept this love and live as his beloved child.

In addition to corporate worship, teaching, and guided practice in whole-group sessions, there was personal time set aside for each one of us to reflect, journal, pray and worship alone, as well as small- and large-group sharing. Lisa also met with several women during the free time for spiritual direction and prayer.

I felt God’s presence with us, and I saw the women relax into places of gratitude for God’s love and their ability to hear his voice. Many planned to follow up using the provided materials in their own devotional time.

The women left rested and renewed, and were very appreciative for Lisa and what she taught and shared, and also for the urging and permission to take time on a daily basis to be quiet before the Lord. Their feedback was very positive. The only regret we had was that the day went by so fast. We—the organizers—were very pleased with the retreat, and felt that Lisa provided exactly what our women needed.

Lisa has a heartfelt appreciation of the work of God’s Spirit in herself and in those around her. She is a spiritual director, called to teach and guide and support and inspire others in cultivating intimacy and Christlike character in our relationship with God. Her gifts of teaching, sharing, leading, and guiding have prepared her to lead such groups in whatever contexts God provides. She is called to the development of transformative spiritual formation in others, and from her own increasing intimacy with Jesus, she leads by example as well as with words.

Nancy Nicholas

Church Elder, Retreat Administrator, retired Church Administrator