

Michelle Lelwica, Th.D., M.T.S.

*The Ethical Challenge of Doing No Harm:
Nourishing Health in a Fat-Shaming Culture*

About the Speaker

Dr. Michelle Lelwica is Professor of Religion at Concordia College, where she teaches courses at the intersection of religion, gender, race, culture, and the body. She received both her Master's of Theological Studies and Doctorate of Theology from Harvard Divinity School. She's the author of *Hurting Kids: What Incarcerated Youth Are Teaching Me about Whiteness, Compassion, Accountability, and Healing* (Wipf & Stock, 2024), *Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement* (Bloomsbury, 2017), *The Religion of Thinness: Satisfying the Spiritual Hungers behind Women's Obsession with Food and Weight* (Gurze, 2009) and *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimensions of Eating Problems among American Girls and Women*

Session Description

This presentation invites the audience to reflect on some significant ethical challenges nutritionists and dieticians face in their efforts to promote health and wellbeing through food and nutrition in the context of a thin-obsessed/fatphobic culture. How do long-standing cultural associations between health and thinness and disease and obesity complicate their work? How can professionals avoid the traps of moralizing health in ways that exacerbate the shame many people—especially women and minorities—are already encouraged to feel about their bodies? Learning to identify and think critically about the religious/moral underpinnings of America's war on fat, the racist roots of fat-phobia, and the assumptions that a thin body is a well body fosters an ethical approach to nutrition and food that reduces shame and nourishes people's minds, bodies, and spirits.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to:

- Learn to recognize the religious/moral underpinnings of America's war on fat, the racist history of fat phobia, and the misleading cultural associations between health and thinness.

- Learn to practice critical thinking about the religious/moral underpinnings of America's war on fat, the racist history of fat phobia, and the misleading cultural associations between health and thinness.
- Learn to cultivate and practice self-awareness, nonviolence, and integrity while helping clients pursue nourishing relationships with food and their bodies in a culture that glorifies thinness.