



International Digital Conference for Researchers, Diaconia Students and Practitioners

Diaconia as Gamechanger? Leadership of Service in Times of Crisis, Complexity and Transformation

17th September 2020

The hosts of the conference are The International Society for the Research and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice, ReDi, and VID Specialized University, a faith and value-based university in Norway. ReDi is a society for all interested in the study and research of the churches contribution to social welfare and health (including very large faith-based welfare organisations and small local initiatives), see <https://www.diaconiaresearch.org/>. Since 2006, ReDi arranges biannual conferences for research in Diaconia and Christian Social Practice. This year's host is VID Specialized University in Norway that undertakes education and research in the fields of health and social sciences, educational science, management, diaconia and theology in Oslo, Bergen, Sandnes and Stavanger, see <https://www.vid.no/en/about-us/>. The conference is also supported by the World Council of Churches.

Conference Theme

In late 2019, ReDi and VID issued an invitation to an international conference for research in Christian Social Practice and Diaconia with the following focus:

The development of society on both global and local level is increasingly described in terms of crisis. First and foremost, climate change is becoming more and more perceptible and posing new problems and challenges for humanity, to stakeholders and all those who bear responsibility. Neoliberal globalisation and economic policies have somehow contributed to increasing social inequalities and injustice, and a growth in unemployment and in precarity of income from employment. Furthermore, demographic developments and forced migration undermine solidarity and lead to tension between generations. The extent and speed of the changes has created fears that materialise socially and politically as radicalisation and right-wing populism.

The agents of Diaconia observe these developments and the practice of Diaconia is itself part of them. How do diaconal organisations and churches meet these challenges? Do they contribute to finding new answers or are they afraid of losing what they are used to have? What does diaconal leadership look like in times of crises and change? How can diaconal leadership be re-imagined based on faith, hope and love? How can research contribute to innovate diaconal practices? How can learning from each other across the continents be stimulated in order for diaconal agents to become vital gamechangers? How can prophetic Diaconia contribute in advocacy efforts in order to prevent urgent needs in today's world?

Why a Digital Conference?

Since then, the pandemic Covid 19 has turned many lives upside down and ruled out most conference planning for 2020. At the same time, the need for two components of the conference have become more apparent. Christian social work is needed both during and in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis, as it is important that the responses of diaconal practice to the crisis use research-based knowledge for their work. Against this background, it is more important than ever that researchers in the field of Christian Social Practice and Diaconia meet to exchange their ideas and knowledge. Because of this, and to give a sign of our global togetherness, the hosts of the conference and its International Advisory Committee have decided to arrange a digital one-day conference in English with the theme Diaconia as Gamechanger? Leadership of Service in Times of Crisis, Complexity and Transformation on **17 September 2020**. A digital conference offers the opportunity and the chance that participants from all continents can meet, present research and discuss the findings and their relevance for practice.

How Do We Set Up the Digital Conference?

We are aware of that many may be wondering if a digitally based exchange of research is not too much of a risk project, since many researchers across the world do not have access to stable internet connections. Therefore, we are at the moment working with finding different technical solutions that make the conference as accessible as possible. It will be possible, for example, to both present in real time or to record the presentation before the conference and to participate in a real time discussion during the conference digitally or in the chat function. We will also create a network of regional hubs with cooperating universities all around the globe so that paper presenters eventually also can participate through these hubs. We will inform you about the technical solutions in good time before the conference on our website. Of course, it is possible to contact us any time about eventual technical questions. Please write to conference@diaconiaresearch.org.

Who is invited?

In this call, we invite abstracts for the digital conference on 17 September 2020. **We encourage in particular researchers from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia and Oceania to submit papers.** We hope that (emerging) researchers, diaconia students and practitioners from many countries will participate in this international exchange event for research and practice-based reflection. The conference language is English. Please do not hesitate to contact conference@diaconiaresearch.org if you want to participate, but are hesitant about presenting in English.

Conference Fee

The conference fee is graduated as follows:

70 NOK for participants from the Global South, diaconia students and PhD students

150 NOK for participants from the Global North

200 NOK for institutions where several employees and students participate.

The conference fee includes:

- the participation in the conference, including a certificate of participation to be issued by ReDi, VID and the World Council of Churches
- the possibility to publish the presented papers in a popular scientific conference publication or in the double-blind peer reviewed journal *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*
- direct access to the popular scientific conference publication and the journal *Diaconia*

The has to be paid when registering. The registration will open on 1 July and close on 5 September 2020.

Submission of Abstracts and Thematic Paper Sessions

The exchange of research and practice-based reflection will mainly take place in thematic paper sessions. We therefore would like to invite to send an abstract of the paper that you want to present than by **29 June 2020** at the latest to conference@diaconiaresearch.org. The abstract should not have more than 200 words and you should indicate which paper session you want to contribute to. The acceptance of the papers will be sent on **2 July 2020**.

Thematic Paper Session

For the digital conference on 17 September 2020, we have identified the following themes for paper sessions. If your paper does not fit to one of the paper sessions, you can always submit it to the open session (8).

1.) Reinventing the Role of Leadership in Innovating Diaconia

We invite researchers and practitioners to a paper session where we explore the overarching theme of leadership and innovation in diaconal and religious organizations. In times of changes and crises, leaders play a key role foregrounding innovation in diaconal and religious organizations. The complex and changing society in which diaconal organizations operate, require leaders paying attention to these changes by leading diaconal organizations in new ways. Diaconal leaders and organizations are challenged to take innovative steps through adaptations, or anticipations, to changes in the society. Moreover, leaders in diaconia are responding to the wider society by rearticulating values and identity to achieve internal and external legitimization that enables support and relevance.

The aim of the paper session is to present and discuss recent research about leadership and management related to innovation processes and practices in various diaconal contexts. Innovation processes consist of both a creativity stage for useful and novel ideas to occur as well as an implementation stage of selected ideas. We welcome papers and contributions that address questions like: How is diaconal leadership understood and performed in times of crises and changes? How do diaconal organizations and churches meet contemporary challenges? How can research on leadership, management and organizations contribute to innovate diaconal practice?

More specific questions could for instance include: How do new and useful ideas emerge in diaconia? What is the role of psychological safety in groups for innovative processes to occur in diaconal organisations? How do practitioners in the field of diaconia organize for equality in

global partnerships? How can diaconal leadership be imagined based on values like faith, hope and love?

The paper session maps existing knowledge on this theme and asks how research can be a resource for leaders in their practical work. We invite full papers, extended abstracts as well as short presentations. Papers will be shared and read before the conference, and the convenors will organize feedback given by respondents. The session will also entail plenary discussion.

Contact: Dag-Håkon Eriksen (dag-hakon.eriksen@vid.no), Beate Jelstad Løvaas (beate.jelstad.lovaas@vid.no) and Stephen Sirris (stephen.sirris@vid.no)

2.) Youth, Diaconia and the Global Crises

Researchers and practitioners are invited to contribute to this paper session on Youth, Diaconia and Global crises. The global society is characterized by fractures, created by global crises, not healing easily. Fractures include and refer to social, economic, religious, spatial, environmental, economic and health issues. Adolescents from poor families are easily excluded from both the labour and education spheres. Furthermore, youth unemployment is among the biggest challenges we face. Likewise, climate change is becoming more and more perceptible and posing new problems and challenges for humanity, to stakeholders and all those who bear responsibility. The youth is right in the centre of the ecological justice, environmental consciousness and climate change discourse. With regards to all these fractures and the current COVID-19 pandemic, how are the youth engage with these discourses but also affected by these fractures? How can/did the youth as game-changing role players in Diakonia, contribute(d) to these global crises?"

Contact: Jacques Beukes (jacques.beukes@up.ac.za)

3.) Drifting Apart? Diaconal Responses to the Demographic Developments, Forced Migration, Crisis of Solidarity and Democracy

This is quite a broad theme, which seeks to open up dialogue with regards to the shifts caused by issues such as forced migration due to wars and poverty and the ongoing inequalities and power differentials between the Global South and Global North. It also raises the issue of growing ethnic/racial polarisation that is developing within many regions and countries. The current pandemic will, no doubt, continue to bring into sharp relief both local and global inequalities. How, then, are diaconal responses shaped by these shifts – critically or uncritically - and also how are diaconal values such as solidarity and democracy challenged by these very same shifts? This session is also open to papers which explore case studies or examples of where this crisis of solidarity and democracy is being engaged by diaconal actors in a specific manner for the common good at grassroots.

Contact: Nadine Bowers-Du Toit (nbowers@sun.ac.za)

4.) Biblical and Theological Paradigms for a Game-changing Diaconia

In keeping the Bible relevant to today's context of diaconia, what hermeneutical approaches play an important role? What biblical narratives, discourses and themes are especially instructive? What theological frontiers are there worth exploring in discerning and making sense of God's

activities in the world, especially for the most vulnerable “citizens” of this our mother earth? This session hopes to bring together various insights from theology and biblical studies as a tool for today’s diaconal praxis.

Contact: solon@diakoniewissenschaft-idm.de or dennis.solon@alumni.uni-heidelberg.de;

5.) Female leadership in church and faith-based institutions – past, present and future

An emerging field within organization and management theories is studying female leaders and their characteristics and contributions. Even though there are plenty of female leaders in the church and in religious organizations, we know less of their contributions, behaviour, and traits. For this workshop, we encourage submissions from all aspects of research on female and especially female leaders in religious organizations. What have been and is characterizing female leaders in faith-based institutions? What kind of life-stories are the female leaders bringing to the institutions? How are these stories of importance? Are these stories different than in business? Are there some connections between innovation and female leaders? What values are female leaders bringing to the forefront? We also seek contributions to the discussion on male and female equality in churches and religious organizations. Female leaders often take part in boards of parishes but do not, in large, seem to be represented on the top. What kind of equality work exist and what are the result of this work in a religious context? A glass ceiling is claimed - an invisible barrier in front of women seeking to move up organizational hierarchies. What kind of norms, organizational cultures, and structures is upholding or breaking the glass ceiling in churches and faith-based organizations?

Contact: Gry Espedal (gry.espedal@vid.no)

6.) Towards a Transforming Diaconia Spirituality

This session will focus on what is a vital Spirituality which empowers the whole process towards a transformed and transforming Diaconia. In a world living in challenging times and where technocracy seems to dominate, Spirituality can inspire the game-changing role of Diaconia today. The session invites papers that explore preconditions and effects of Diaconia Spirituality and how it can be understood. It welcomes papers from a broad range of disciplines from theology to social sciences and health studies and much more. Papers can be either empirical or theoretical and have descriptive or normative approaches.

Contact: Carlos Ham (cehams@gmail.com)

7.) Christian Social Practice Research Methodologies

Christian social practice research is often considered an interdisciplinary academic venture. There are ongoing discussions on intersections between theology, social sciences, humanities, nursing studies and ethics within in the diaconia research. Connected to these discussions there are also parallel discussions on specific methodological ambitions in this field. There is a mix of

hermeneutical, interpretative methods as well as ethnography, qualitative and quantitative methods and also combination of at least two of these approaches. Many contributions expand the question of methodology into the broader issue of the identity of Christian social practice research.

These contributions also often combine methodology developed within the social sciences, hermeneutics and interpretations of what the “data” of this research is. This has opened the discussion in a fruitful way, but there is time to increase the number and variety of reflections.

We are interested in proposals that discuss issues like:

- The relation between empirical and normative/theological approaches
- Interpretations of the kind of data relevant for diaconia research
- The role of the researcher in the data collection and in the written texts
- Is there a transformative expectation for diaconia research?

The papers can discuss methodology as a specific topic or use data/theories to illustrate the methodological reflections.

Contact: Kaia Rønsdal (k.d.m.s.ronsdal@teologi.uio.no) and Trygve Wyller (Trygve.wyller@teologi.uio.no).

8.) Open Session: Miscellaneous Papers

If the paper that you want to present does not fit to any of the announced thematic sessions, please do not hesitate to submit it anyway. We will organise a session that collects all the other papers.

Contact: Annette Leis-Peters (annette.leis-peters@vid.no)