

Report on Re-Di (Research Diaconia) for DIAKONIA World Federation Executive Committee
The International Society for the Research and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice

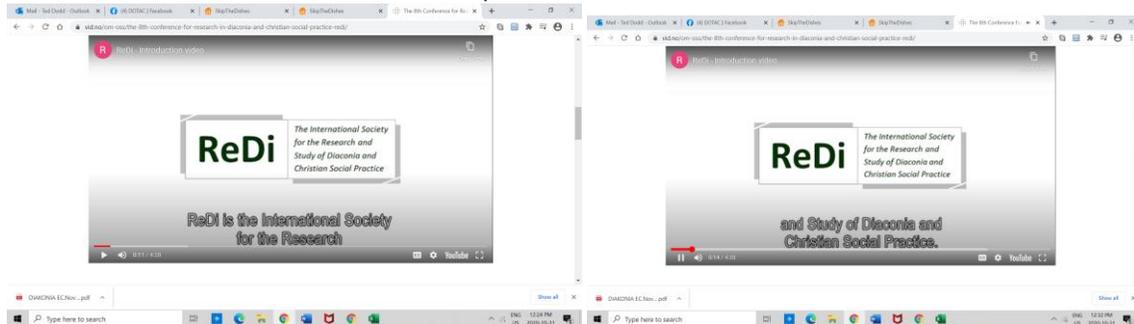
An online conference

September 17, 2020

1 am – 2 pm Central Daylight Time

DOTAC Debriefing Session

September 18, 2020



On September 17, the Research Diaconia Zoom conference, offered a far-reaching range of presentations from around the globe. The wide variety of the understanding, practice and theology of the diaconate broadened my outlook. The rich sharing of ideas deepened my diaconal identity with intellectually stimulating ideas and studies.

Because of the hour for North America – mostly in the middle of the night -- participation was hampered. Most people took part in segments of the conference. And we selected different panel presentations so we were in different breakout “rooms”. I counted 20 people who used the DOTAC institutional registration to participate.

Two keynote speakers shared their understanding of the conference’s theme *Diakonia as Gamechanger?: Leadership of Service in Times of Crisis, Complexity and Transformation* from an Asian and from an African perspective. Clearly, this organization was working hard to expand its horizons beyond its European origins.

Panel presentations that I attended continued the diversity of perspective:

- a Norwegian researcher studied the impact of a program active in churches through Africa -- *Use Your Talents*. The program focuses on the Parable of the Talents as a key scriptural image but one woman quoted in the study pointed to the David and Goliath story saying for her context, “Goliath is poverty”.
- German understandings and expressions of diakonia are dominated by their massive social work networks that grew out of the deaconess Motherhouses. Currently, these agencies are staffed by a majority of people who are not Christian, so one researcher from Heidelberg, was outlining various ways to address pluralism in these faith-based institutions.
- An Australian originally from China outlined the vast network of social agencies in the Uniting Church of Australia. He also upheld a theology of incarnation for diakonia (Matthew 25 – least of these is where we see the Christ)
- A professor from the Philippines explored the biblical roots of gratitude as a paradigm for practising diakonia
- A researcher in Germany shared her study of an organization that reclaimed an abandoned industrial site and was using the facility to locate many social enterprises

- A historian shared the lives of three women who were “firsts” in the church of Norway and compared their leadership styles with male models. The women tended to stress communal approaches and idealistic principles.
- A Cuban championed the inclusion of indigenous traditions and anti-colonial reconciliation for a diakonia based in a socially committed spirituality.



- A Filipino studying in South Africa examined the fear-based dehumanizing and othering tactics of the Duterte government’s “war on drugs”.
- A Swedish congregational study suggested diakonia would be enhanced by an alliance of learning-oriented deacons (there is at least one deacon in every church) and strategic vicars (pastors).
- From South Africa, a presentation on a Christian theology of migration used the Abraham and Sarah and Lot stories from Genesis to understand the work with displaced peoples.

On Friday, September 18, DOTAC offered a Zoom de-briefing session. The attendance was small but the discussion indicated that the conference was highly appreciated. Two issues emerged in the conversation:

- Diaconal Formation -- support and networking of ecumenical and international educational programs for those training for the diaconate
- Diaconal Scholarship – sharing of resources and encouraging writing about the theology of diakonia

ReDi offers an opportunity for connection that would be very worthwhile for DWF. However, institutional membership in ReDi is expensive: 300 Euros a year. Can we discuss the way forward for DWF to partner with ReDi at this meeting or an upcoming one? This brief introductory video gives a taste of the organization. <https://www.vid.no/om-oss/the-8th-conference-for-research-in-diaconia-and-christian-social-practice-redi/>

Ted Dodd
President of DOTAC