

CODE Forum 2026

Introduction to the Main Speakers & Keynote Lectures

Nadine Bowers du Toit

Toxic Empathy? The challenge of rightist discourse on development and diakonia

This paper explores the rise of right-wing religious discourse, best exemplified by the book entitled “Toxic Empathy: how progressives exploit Christian compassion” (2024) authored by conservative US commentator Allie Beth Stucky, and the way in which it challenges core ethical kingdom values such as compassion, human dignity and justice, which undergird development and diaconal praxis. The paper begins by outlining the current state of the cuts in global development funding and the response from global Christian aid and diakonia organisations and explores way in which this problematic claim of “toxic empathy” intersects with these cuts. The paper seeks to present recommendations directed towards church and diaconal organisations with regard to how this claim could be resisted.

Biographies and Background of the Speaker:

Nadine Bowers Du Toit

Prof Dr. Nadine Bowers Du Toit is the Professor of Practical Theology (Community Development) in the Dept. Practical Theology & Missiology at the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. She holds a PhD in Practical Theology (Theology and Development) and her research over the past 20 years has focused on the role of faith communities in addressing the intersecting issues of poverty, race, inequality, and gender. Besides lecturing, publishing and supervising post graduate students, Nadine is often invited to address congregations, church leaders and Faith Based Organizations on topics pertaining to social justice and diakonia. Nadine is the director of the Unit for Religion and Development (URDR) and serves on the boards of several Non-Governmental Organisations. She is also a previous president of the International Academy of Practical Theology and previous vice president of REDI. She sees herself as an activist academic always seeking to push for space for more voices to be heard.