

CODE Forum 2026

Introduction to the Papers and Workshops

Rosalie Schoemaker

The (im)possibilities of equal partnerships in diaconate linked to migration

Are equal partnerships between people with and without migration backgrounds possible in Dutch diaconal projects? Building on theories from international development studies, rev. Wells' Nazareth Manifesto offers a pathway to rethink providing help for people to being with them. Analysis of documents, participant observation and interviews within 10 diaconal projects reveal that that power asymmetries are persistent. The levels of agency vary greatly between people involved in the projects. Staff (paid or voluntary) are often motivated by faith, justice, and human dignity, yet they often continue to see themselves primarily as helpers. Some participants however, developed reciprocal friendships through their diaconal work.

What are next steps towards more equal partnerships? The findings suggest that adopting a mission of being with will transform the project objectives, processes of feedback and accountability, the extent to which responsibilities are shared, and ways intercultural contact is navigated. We will discuss the strategies to balance power asymmetries that we find in our own practice and research, in particular those in the context of migration. A question to ponder: do you believe friendships are feasible, or is inequality inherent in diaconate?