

CODE Forum 2026

Introduction to the Papers and Workshops

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Dialogue in Social Work and Diaconia: Needs for Expertise in Religious Contexts in Finland

Dialogical models in social work have been developed in largely secular contexts. In the 21st century, however, Western societies have become increasingly multicultural and multireligious, and many forms of ideological polarization have shaped the landscape forcefully. This trend has enhanced the need for dialogical approaches in social work as well as in diaconia. This presentation aims to clarify the needs for dialogical expertise in social work and diaconia especially in religious contexts in Finland. The discussed social work approaches include the Open Dialogue model, originally developed by family therapist Jaakko Seikkula and colleagues at Keropudas Hospital in Northern Finland. Religious issues in social work contexts will be addressed through certain preliminary findings

from the on-going Social Work and Religion (Sowrel) research project, in collaboration with the University of Turku and the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) in Helsinki. The central concepts in the dialogical approaches to diaconia discussed here include counselling, empowerment, conviviality and cultural diversity in congregations. The results of this research venture can help rethink diaconal identity and expertise in challenging multireligious contexts and particularly in collaborative settings with secular social workers.