

4. The Offene Kirche Elisabethen: History, Theology, and Context

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen fills a unique role in the city of Basel. It is part of the two main, historical Christian denominations in Basel, the Evangelical-Reformed Church of Basel and the Roman Catholic Church in Basel. While the building, its pastors, and some of its programs and staff are supported by these two churches, the OKE does not have a traditional church structure or offerings. Founded in 1994 in response to changes in religious affiliation, church demographics, and theological commitments, the OKE was the first City Church in Switzerland. The City Church movement began in Europe in the 1990s to address declining religious affiliation and the increased diversity of people and social, cultural, and religious needs in the city. City Churches engaged more actively with social and political issues facing the city and with people who do not affiliate with religious organizations or churches; they also initiated cultural, ecumenical, and interfaith projects. In this spirit, the OKE's mission is to be a spiritual, cultural, and social resource for all people in the city of Basel, regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliation. Three theological strands – urban theology, public theology, and convivence – impacted the development of the City Church movement, the Offene Kirche Elisabethen, and, subsequently, Projekt DA-SEIN. In this chapter I trace how these three strands led to the articulation and evolution of the mission and programs of the OKE, and in turn, those of Projekt DA-SEIN.

4.1 The Elisabethenkirche in Basel

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen was established as the first City Church in Switzerland in 1994.¹ The church is housed in the *Elisabethenkirche*, a neo-Gothic style church on the edge of Basel's old town (*Alt-Stadt*) and in close proximity to the city's main railroad station. The Elisabethenkirche was constructed between 1857 and 1864 as a

1 In 2018, there were eight City Churches in Switzerland, most of them founded between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s.

Reformed church on the site of a historical, smaller church that was built in the 13th century and that had served as a hospital chapel and cemetery.² The new church was commissioned by Christoph Merian, a member of a prominent Basel aristocratic family, and was the first Reformed church built in Basel after the Reformation.³

The Elisabethenkirche is part of the Evangelical-Reformed Church of Basel (Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche Basel-Stadt/ERK-BS). In Basel the historic state churches (*Landeskirchen*), the Evangelical-Reformed Church and the diocesan Roman Catholic Church, are “Public Law Corporations” (“*Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts*”), which are recognized under public law and have certain obligations and privileges, such as the ability to collect taxes from registered members.⁴ Those who affiliate with these denominations pay taxes, have access to specific religious services, and are officially recorded as members of the church within their specific parish.⁵ These churches continue to occupy significant religious, cultural, and social roles in the city and are officially recognized by the cantonal governments. Today, the Evangelical-Reformed church in Basel-Stadt maintains seven congregational centers in seven Basel neighborhoods, owns 85 buildings in the canton, including churches, rectories, and residences, and runs numerous para-church and social service organizations.⁶

As the relationship between churches and the state shifted in the 20th century, how churches interacted with the city also changed. In the 1960s the Elisabethenkirche experienced a decline in membership due to two demographic changes that impacted churches in cities. First, urban and commercial development in the city center led to a decrease in the residential population, which slowly moved out of city centers to surrounding city districts and suburbs. Second, religious

2 altbasel.ch, “Die Alte Elisabethenkirche,” accessed May 17, 2019, https://altbasel.ch/fromm/s_tlisbeth.html.

3 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Geschichte.”

4 For more information, see: Christoph Winzeler, “Staat und Religionen in Der Schweiz: Eine Rechtliche Perspektive,” *Religion.ch* (2021), <https://www.religion.ch/blog/staat-und-religionen-in-der-schweiz-eine-rechtliche-perspektive/>; Matthias Mahlmann, “Einführung in Die Rechtswissenschaft E-Skript: 14.2.2 Situation in Der Schweiz,” Universität Zürich, accessed November 10, 2021, https://www.rwi.uzh.ch/elt-1st-mahlmann/einfuehrungrw/religion/de/html/zur_vertiefung_learningObject2.html; Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation*.

5 Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche Basel-Stadt, “Kirchen & Gemeinden,” accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.erk-bs.ch/kirchgemeinden>.

6 These include the Zwinglihaus (a center for education and interreligious dialogue), student housing, the OKE, and social outreach organizations, as well as the Basel Münster. The Münster was the cathedral of the diocese of Basel until the Reformation in 1529 and remains an important Reformed church and cultural and geographic center of the city. In addition, religious holidays and festivals continue to be part of the official city calendar.

affiliation decreased across the population while other religions and denominations, as well as the number of those who have no religious affiliation, increased.⁷ Despite the continued centrality of the Evangelical and Catholic churches, official and unofficial membership in these denominations has steadily declined in the last half-century. In 1970, over 95% of the Swiss population identified as a member of either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant Evangelical-Reformed church (48.8% Reformed, 46.7% Roman Catholic).⁸ In 2017 the landscape looked very different, with less than 60% of the population identifying with the Evangelical-Reformed or Roman Catholic churches (23.8% Reformed, 35.9% Roman Catholic).⁹ The largest increase is among those who identify as *konfessionslos* (without a confession or unaffiliated), known as “nones” in the United States (this group increased from 1.2% of the Swiss population in 1970 to 26% of the population in 2017).¹⁰ The canton of Basel-Stadt has a particularly high percentage of residents who identify as *konfessionslos*. In 2017 this group totaled nearly 50% of the Basel population.¹¹ Despite its historic affiliation, only 16% of the population of Basel-Stadt continues to identify with the Evangelical-Reformed Church.¹² Of this group, committed church members who attend services regularly are a much smaller group compared to “distant” members who do not participate regularly, if at all.¹³ According to some studies this distant group represents 95% of church members in Switzerland.¹⁴ The decrease in reli-

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- 7 Monika Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel – Offen und Gastfreundlich,” *Diakonia* 44, no. 1 (2013), <https://www.diakonia-online.net>.
 - 8 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Ständige Wohnbevölkerung ab 15 Jahren nach Religionszugehörigkeit seit 1910* (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2019), <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/sprachen-religionen/religionen.assetdetail.33947017.html>.
 - 9 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Ständige Wohnbevölkerung ab 15 Jahren nach Religionszugehörigkeit seit 1910*.
 - 10 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Ständige Wohnbevölkerung ab 15 Jahren nach Religionszugehörigkeit seit 1910*.
 - 11 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Ständige Wohnbevölkerung ab 15 Jahren nach Religionszugehörigkeit und Kantonen* (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2017), <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/sprachen-religionen/religionen.assetdetail.33947019.html>.
 - 12 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Ständige Wohnbevölkerung ab 15 Jahren nach Religionszugehörigkeit und Kantonen*.
 - 13 Birgit Weyel, “Kirchenmitgliedschaft,” in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchener Theologie, 2014).
 - 14 Wilhelm Gräb, “Kirche als Ort der Religion,” in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 103. In Basel, 17% of residents identify as Roman Catholic. Despite Basel’s history of being Evangelical-Reformed, the higher number of Roman Catholic members can be attributed to migration and an influx of Roman Catholics from other countries. Data is not available at the cantonal level, but in Switzerland-wide data, the percentage of people who identify as Roman Catholic increases dramatically if they have a migration background. Migration has had the effect of keeping Roman Catholic membership higher than the Reformed church, bringing in a proliferation

gious affiliation between the 1970s and the 2000s caused congregations to shrink and the demographics to shift older. Many large church buildings sat empty as their connection to the surrounding communities dwindled.

4.1.1 The Founding of the Offene Kirche Elisabethen

In 1968, amid this decline in urban density and religious affiliation, the Basel theater was rebuilt directly next to the Elisabethenkirche, leading to discussions on whether to demolish the church and replace it with a parking garage, a new museum building, or a shopping and residential area.¹⁵ Because the Elisabethenkirche was one of the most important neo-gothic buildings in Switzerland (in Basel), the church was kept, despite its small congregation.¹⁶ Yet, when another church, the *Lukaskirche*, was built in 1973 to serve the outer quarters of the city, the Elisabethenkirche ceased to be an operational congregation and was used for short-term projects until 1990, when the outside of the church was renovated.¹⁷ At the same time, though the residential population decreased, the city center saw an increase in the number of daily visitors, as people traveled to the city center for work, shopping, and entertainment. A greater diversity of people circulated through the neighborhoods surrounding the Elisabethenkirche, bringing with them different spiritual, cultural, and social needs.

In 1991 Hansruedi Felix submitted a proposal to the Synod Council of the Reformed Church of Basel to create an “Open Church,” and the Offene Kirche Elisabethen established itself as an independent association (*Verein*); the goal was to make the Elisabethenkirche a City Church, with an open and ecumenical mission to serve the city of Basel outside of traditional congregation structures.¹⁸ In April 1994 the OKE was officially founded, with Hansruedi Felix as the church’s first pastor. Hansruedi Felix (at that time using the name H.R. Felix Felix) was a young theologian and founding member of the Christian intentional community, *Kommunität Friedensgasse*, which was located in the city center of Basel and committed to reaching beyond denominational divisions, living in solidarity with the poor and marginalized,

of independent churches, and increasing other religious affiliations, including Islam. Yet, the percentage of those with an affiliation with Islam has increased less than the percentage of those with no affiliation.

15 Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel.”

16 See: Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel,” 57; Offene Kirche Elisabethen, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Geschichte.”

17 Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel,” 57.

18 Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel,” 57; Schubert, “City Churches”; Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1El_IN.

and meeting social needs in the city.¹⁹ The community was established in response to the same changes that were confronting urban churches, namely shifting urban demographics and decreasing religious affiliation. In response, it sought to be open to the diversity in the city and to express the Christian faith in more dynamic and inclusive ways.²⁰

In 1988 Hansruedi Felix wrote down a vision for an “open church” that would bring together different people and cultures in a space that would include both religious and secular offerings.²¹ Felix wrote, “The church should be a habitat (*Lebensraum*) for many different people and cultures, an everyday living space, a ‘Biotope.’”²² This pluralistic church would include cultural events as well as religious and secular offerings and be a place for people to gather regardless of religious affiliation or cultural background.²³ Shortly after Felix wrote his inspiration for an “open church,” he spent two months in the United Kingdom, where he encountered St. James Piccadilly Church in London under the leadership of Anglican priest Donald Reeves. Felix saw many parallels between St. James Piccadilly and his own vision for an “open church.” St. James Piccadilly offered a health and healing center, a cafe, and a variety of religious and secular offerings, from concerts to yoga to prayer services. Felix noted that the church attracted many different people, including bankers, those from the social margins, artists, musicians, and healers.²⁴ St. James Piccadilly was part of an emerging City Church movement that sought to reimagine the role of the church in response to social, economic, and cultural shifts within cities. Felix also visited churches in the Netherlands that were being repurposed to meet social and religious needs in their cities.²⁵

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- 19 Catherine Brunner-Dubey and Pierre Brunner-Dubey, *Kraftvoll Einkehren: Eckpfeiler für eine Kirche der Zukunft* (Rex-Verlag, 1996), 31. Aspects of the community's work included diaconical community (living with people experiencing difficult life situations) and solidarity with the poor. Over the years (*Friedensgasse* disbanded in 2004), the community took in people who were struggling to find housing due to homelessness, disability, or addiction; ran a soup kitchen called *Gassenküche*; established a day-shelter for the homeless, known as Wall-Strasse; and led LGBT-welcoming religious services.
- 20 Schubert, “City Churches,” 84.
- 21 Hansruedi Felix, “Der Anfang Der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen: Was Einem Jungen Theologen Als Vision Auf Dem Velo Geschenkt Wurde, Nahmen Kluge Kirchenrätinnen Auf: Felix Felix Traf Aber Auch Auf Vorbilder. Ein Bericht Von Ganz Am Anfang,” in *Hallelu-JO: JO Zum Låbe JO Zum Liebe* (Offene Kirche Elisabethen, 2018), 16–19. Felix's idea was inspired by his experiences with the *Kommunitåt Friedensgasse*, his interest in the mystical experiences of the early church, and his encounter with urban theologies, especially the work of Harvey Cox.
- 22 Felix, “Der Anfang Der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen,” 16–19.
- 23 Felix, “Der Anfang Der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen.”
- 24 Felix, “Der Anfang Der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen,” 17.
- 25 Toni Schürmann, “Die Pionierkirche,” *Reformiert*, March 25, 2019, <https://reformiert.info/artikel/recherche/die-pionierkirche>.

When the Offene Kirche Elisabethen opened on April 30, 1994, it was the first City Church in Switzerland.²⁶ Today, there are eight City Churches in Switzerland, seven of them in German-speaking cantons and one in Geneva, a French-speaking canton.²⁷ They are located in urban areas and are usually ecumenical partnerships between the cantonal Evangelical-Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and sometimes also the Old Catholic Church (*Christkatholisches Kirche*). The Swiss City Churches share common themes, including an ecumenical and interfaith orientation, an openness to all people regardless of religious affiliation, and a program of diverse cultural, spiritual, and social offerings.²⁸ While each church has a slightly different character, the City Church movement sought to re-imagine religious structures and commitments in response to changes in urban demographics and religious affiliations.

4.1.2 The City Church Movement

City Churches in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland reimagined their diaconal and missional imperatives in response to the changes in urban demographics and church affiliation.²⁹ These churches began to imagine ways to keep their buildings open and relevant, to reinvigorate spiritual traditions, to minister to diverse people, and to preserve and utilize their buildings. They sought to respond to the needs of their surrounding communities, even if their

26 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, "Offene Kirche Elisabethen Geschichte."

27 Bahnhofkirche Zürich, "Über Uns: Entstehungsgeschichte," accessed September 10, 2019, <https://www.bahnhofkirche.ch/angebote/entstehungsgeschichte/>; Wirk Raum Kirche, "Offene Kirche: Experimentierraum, Bewegungsraum | Die Offene Kirche Ist Eine Institution in St. Gallen. Für Weltoffenheit und Dialog," accessed September 10, 2019, <https://www.wirkraumkirche.ch/DE/4/OffeneKirche.htm>; Reformierte Citykirche offener St. Jakob, "Offene Kirchen in Der Schweiz," accessed August 26, 2019, <https://www.citykirche.ch/links>. *Offene Kirche Bern* was established in 1999 in the *Heiliggeistkirche*, the most central church in the capital city of Bern. The *Bahnhofskirche* in Zürich was established in 2001. Unlike other City Churches, it was not established in an existing church building, instead it is located in the main train station. A second City Church, *Citykirche Offener St. Jakob*, is located in a more traditional church setting in Zürich. *Offene Kirche St. Gallen* was established in 1998 in the *Kirche St. Leonhard*. In 2005 it moved to a new location in a building that was not historically a church. *Offene Kirche Region Olten* opened in 2003, and *City-Kirche Zug* opened in 2006. The City Church in Geneva, *Église Évangélique de Plainpalais*, is part of a more traditional church structure and also operates an intentional community with housing for young men.

28 Offene Kirche Bern, "Offene Kirche Bern' – Die Berner Citykirche: Wer Wir Sind und Wofür Wir Stehen," Offene Kirche Bern, accessed September 10, 2019, <https://www.offene-kirche.ch/ueber-uns/offene-kirche-bern-die-berner-citykirche/>. For instance, the *Bahnhofskirche* in Zug focuses on being a place of quiet and stillness, while *Offene Kirche Bern* hosts more religious and cultural events.

29 Schürmann, "Die Pionierkirche."

responses did not fall into traditional categories of church services or outreach. Church has historically been defined as the place where people practice the Christian faith, follow Christian teachings and practices, orient their understanding of reality, and connect with a community of believers.³⁰ As early as the 1960s, scholars such as Harvey Cox argued for churches to engage more directly with the surrounding society and secular concerns, particularly in urban spaces.³¹ Cox presented a definition of the church not as an institution, but as the people, actions, and faith that constitute its work. Cox, and others, argued that these practices, religious or not, are more indicative of faith than religious affiliation.³² This reframing of church priorities helped shift churches away from offering primarily religious services to a local congregation and towards offering social and secular programs to more diverse populations.

City Churches sought to build on their capital in the city as historic and geographic centers of social, cultural, and religious meaning-making. Through increased engagement with secular and social concerns, that were traditionally located outside of the church, City Churches broadened their understandings of religious commitments to include the offering of ecumenical, interfaith, and secular programs. City Churches might still host religious services, but they might occur at times more conducive to the schedules of office workers or they might respond to the needs of particular groups, such as nurses and doctors.³³ City Churches continue to witness to the Christian faith by honoring the theology, beliefs, and practices of their traditions, but they use these traditions to inspire work beyond the usual parameters of religious practice. Secular offerings and practices from other religious and spiritual traditions are incorporated into their work and their programs are adapted to address the broader needs and populations of their communities.

4.2 The Offene Kirche Elisabethen Today

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen is part of Basel's institutional church structures and is funded by the two historic churches in Basel – the Evangelical-Reformed Church (ERK) and the Roman Catholic Church of Basel-Stadt.³⁴ The church building is

30 Gräb, "Kirche als Ort der Religion," 189.

31 Paul H. Ballard, ed., *The Church at the Centre of the City* (Epworth, 2008), 5.

32 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 2013). This focus on actions over institutional structures has its roots in the Reformation. Many reformers, including Martin Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, emphasized works as the most important aspect of faith, over and against the Catholic church's focus on piety.

33 Teschner, *City-Kirche Modelle, Erfahrungen, Ideen*.

34 Schubert, "City Churches," 95.

owned by the ERK of Basel-Stadt. The individuals that make up the OKE's leadership, a Catholic theologian and a Protestant pastor, are trained and partly paid by their respective churches.³⁵ In addition, the Evangelical-Reformed Church of the neighboring canton, Basel-Land, also supports the church (the Roman Catholic church of Basel-Land occasionally supports special events of the church). In addition, it raises some of its own money through private donations, foundation support, and church rentals.³⁶ The OKE does not have a traditional parish structure and programs are open to anyone who is interested.³⁷ Currently, the church is led by a Protestant pastor, Frank Lorenz, and a Catholic theologian, Anne Burgmer. Burgmer replaced the Catholic theologian Monika Hungerbühler, who held the position from 2010 to 2022 (including during the time I completed this study).

While deeply rooted in the historic churches of Basel, the OKE's mission reaches beyond congregational church structures, in part by offering more diverse programs and using more inclusive language. The original mission statement (*Grundsatzpapier*) of the OKE was written in 1994 and clearly situates the OKE within the Christian tradition. It names several themes as central to its mission: an encounter with the Jewish-Christian tradition; a connection to the mystery of Christ; reconciliation across religious traditions; and an ecumenical orientation in the worldwide church. In August 2012 a new *Grundsatzpapier* was written by the current ministers of the church at that time, Hungerbühler and Andre Feuz, a Protestant pastor. The 2012 document contains key theological themes but uses less overt religious language.³⁸ The document focuses on the church's welcome of diversity and a shared and common life.

In 2018, the OKE website described itself as a church in the following way:

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen (OKE) is a City Church for Basel and the surrounding region. Since 1994 it has provided spiritual, cultural and social offerings for all people, regardless of origin, skin color, sexual orientation or religion. The church is open to all people of good will. It lives the Jewish-Christian tradition with an ecumenical responsibility and an interreligious awareness.³⁹

35 In 2018, Hungerbühler was the Catholic theologian, and the Protestant pastor was Lorenz.

36 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116_2EI_IN, Pos. 79; 20190115_1EI_IN, Pos. 117.

37 Schubert, "City Churches," 88–89.

38 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Die Grundsätze der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen* (Offene Kirche Elisabethen, 1994); Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Grundsatzpapier* (Offene Kirche Elisabethen, 2012).

39 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, "Die Offene Kirche Elisabethen (OKE)," accessed September 8, 2018, <https://www.offenekirche.ch/de.html>.

The OKE identifies a three-fold focus on offering spiritual, cultural, and social opportunities to people in the city of Basel.⁴⁰ Spiritual offerings include weekly opportunities to meet with a pastor, meditation and prayer times, and church services that are held specifically for and by women or that are held for specific religious and non-religious holidays.⁴¹ Religious services and programs reflect important occasions based on a variety of commitments. Some services occur as part of the Christian calendar, others reflect important events for the residents of Basel, and others serve particular groups (such as women, LGBTQ people, and refugees). During 2018, the two largest services at the OKE were Easter, featuring traditional Swiss yodeling led by two Projekt DA-SEIN volunteers, and *Fastnacht*, marking the beloved and centuries-old Basel Carnival season. There is a de-emphasis on rites of passage such as baptism, confirmation, and marriage. Among the first offerings of the newly created OKE were monthly services for LGBTQ Christians and animal blessings.⁴² The OKE directly addresses social and cultural concerns, such as when it hosts the monthly *Basel im Gespräch* program, a monthly forum that features speakers and public discussion on an issue impacting Basel. Topics in 2018 included a tax initiative on an upcoming ballot, the debate surrounding the right-to-die movement, and the role of immigrants in Swiss life. The Offene Kirche Elisabethen hosts exhibits and concerts and runs the café out of a side entrance of the church. In addition, the church rents the church sanctuary for cultural and social groups, including monthly services of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and regular discos catering to 30- and 40-somethings in Basel. In the area of social outreach, the church hosts a toy collection around Christmas, a weekly food bank, and it is active in refugee work through Projekt DA-SEIN and KOFFF, a service that coordinates volunteer opportunities to serve refugees around the city.⁴³

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen is grounded in the Christian tradition yet is programmatically and structurally removed from many traditional aspects of church, instead focusing on the religious needs of the residents of Basel, regardless of religious affiliation or membership. This reframing of membership mirrors wider trends in church participation that I will explore below. In addition to attracting a broader membership, the OKE focuses on two of the four traditional areas of work (especially in Roman Catholic theology) that being a church comprises: *Martyria*, *Diakonia*, *Leitourgia*, and *Koinonia*. The OKE focuses on *Diakonia*, service to others, and

40 Hungerbühler, "Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel," 58.

41 Hungerbühler, "Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel"; Offene Kirche Elisabethen, "Die Offene Kirche Elisabethen (OKE)."

42 Schubert, "City Churches."

43 Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz, Kanton Basel-Stadt, "Koordinationsstelle Freiwillige Für Flüchtlinge Basel (KOFFF)."

Koinonia, gathering in community.⁴⁴ These areas of work have shaped the outreach and programs that the OKE offers and are guided by the mission statements of the church. Shifts in membership and a commitment to openness and convivence have shaped the priorities of the OKE. These themes are reflected in religious and secular language on the church's website, in programming, in the mission statements that shape how the OKE engages with the city, in the church's theology and social values, and in the affective experiences of participating in programs.

4.2.1 Membership at the OKE

The OKE shows up in the religious space of Basel and offers a model of religious belonging that is often in contrast with historic church understandings of membership. As an open, ecumenical City Church, the OKE challenges traditional understandings of church membership, especially within the established *Landeskirchen*. The OKE is committed to being a place for all people in the city of Basel, with a focus on public concerns. This commitment means it is situated within both the structures of the Swiss church and the broader experiences of life in the city.

The OKE's reframing of membership parallels both the decrease in church affiliation and the broader changes in civic engagement. Membership in organizations has shifted from long-term commitments based on tradition and need to commitments that are short-term, selective, and reflective of personal choice. In the face of this declining membership, many churches ask who its church members are, if the majority of the surrounding population are not church members. Churches are asking who they serve and what church look likes if membership is no longer based on tradition or historic affiliation. These shifts in church membership have raised the question of what defines a congregation, including whether a congregation is separate from the world or part of the society.⁴⁵ Traditionally, a parish is oriented towards its members and serves them through the activities of the church calendar, through hosting regular services and gatherings, and through offering Christian education and rites of passage. Guests and visitors may participate in some of these offerings, such as weekly services, but not all church activities are available to non-members. In this model, service to those outside of the church is an extension of the religious life of its members and its faithfulness to church teachings. Traditionally, this meant addressing social needs, evangelization, and moral leadership in relation to the secular world.

Yet, the OKE inverts this question by accepting the secular world as part of its congregation. In this situation, the divide between guest and member blurs. As

44 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116_2EI_IN.

45 Uta Pohl-Patalong, "Kirche bei neuen Gelegenheiten," in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 101–2.

noted, nearly 50% of Basel's residents identify as *konfessionslos* or without religious affiliation. In addition, with over 95% of church members "distant," some churches seek to create a space for distant members who, nonetheless, still have a motivation to search for religious meaning.⁴⁶ Scholars such as Wilhelm Gräß suggest creating opportunities where "spiritual experiences can be made and [where] it is not about facts and numbers, but is about meaning."⁴⁷ These goals mirror programs at the OKE that seek to create a space for those who seek meaning and connection over facts and tradition. In this vein, the Offene Kirche Elisabethen sees itself as neither set apart from the world, nor offering a specific image of God.⁴⁸ Lorenz emphasizes, "Some churches tend to say that they are an oasis of silence. We don't say that [...] We are part of the society and try to make this world a better place, to leave an empty space for God."⁴⁹ The church hopes to be a space for people to find the God they are looking for.⁵⁰

Hungerbühler reflects that if people who come to the church do not affiliate with a denomination, then denominational distinctions are also not relevant.⁵¹ In fact, the current leadership at the OKE defines the church not as ecumenical, as in the original *Grundsatzpapier*, but as "post-denominational" or, in German, *post-konfessionell*. Ecumenism refers to work between denominations, yet this definition does not fit when denominational affiliations are not present. Hungerbühler explains, "Denominations simply do not play a role anymore for either us or for the people, the volunteers who work here, and those who come to the church [...] Most of them do not belong to a church."⁵² Hungerbühler shares that it is not important for the Offene Kirche Elisabethen whether people who come there are officially part of the church and pay taxes.

Lorenz reiterates that the goal of the OKE is one of inclusion, harkening back to the original disciples. "Ecumenical is just trying to get one or two or three traditions together [...] but there was once a community of people who dreamt bigger. This big dream included each and everybody, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, workers

46 Gräß, "Kirche als Ort der Religion," 193.

47 Gräß, "Kirche als Ort der Religion," 193–94.

48 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1EI_IN, Pos. 215.

49 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1EI_IN, Pos. 215.

50 Reformierte Kirchengemeinde Gundeldingen-Bruderholz, "OFFLine: Ort Der Stille und Begleitung," accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.erk-bs.ch/kg/gundeldingen-bruderholz/offline-gubru>. Other church programs in Basel have different goals, for instance the Basel Off-line program, hosted at Basel's Bruderholz church, seeks to provide a place of respite, retreat, and quiet from the city and everyday concerns.

51 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116_2EI_IN, Pos. 79;

Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1EI_IN.

52 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 16, 2019: 20190116_2EI_IN, Pos. 101.

and widows.”⁵³ This sense of inclusion stretches beyond denominations and beyond designations of belief and unbelief. The OKE hopes to be a space for people to find the God they are looking for, not the God offered by the church. Instead of creating church for people, the OKE seeks to allow the church and its theology to reflect the people.⁵⁴ This dialectical relationship between theology and people’s spiritual seeking is a constant conversation at the OKE. Hungerbühler says she is often asked what the limits are on what the church will offer or address. She writes: “In principle, the borders are very wide, as the leadership team interprets the Gospel. [...] The team orients itself around the fullness of life and attempts more to justify why an event should not find space with us versus the other way around.”⁵⁵ In this way, the church is oriented more toward acknowledging the otherness and alterity that already exists in its members and surrounding community. This recognizes that the God presented in a church may not be the God accepted by each individual member. Acknowledging this space has the potential to bring in more people and include the fullness of their experiences. As Lorenz says, “My personal motivation is to have this church as an empty space for the God that most people are looking for. Many people search for what might be God for them and I want to have this space open for these searchers for God.”⁵⁶ The openness of the OKE allows for many different iterations of belonging, religious expression, and engagement with the city.

Despite the OKE’s distance from traditional identifiers of religious belonging, many people feel “at home” at the church. Many people express a sense of belonging to the Offene Kirche Elisabethen, regardless of their personal beliefs or official religious affiliation. As Lorenz says, “Many people in Basel say: ‘We don’t belong to the church anymore, but the OKE, that is, if talking about church, if there is any, it’s the OKE.’”⁵⁷ In my time as a volunteer at Projekt DA-SEIN, I found this sentiment frequently expressed among volunteers. Many people who attend programs at the Offene Kirche Elisabethen, and the population in Basel as a whole, do not affiliate with a religious denomination. One volunteer had left the church years before, yet through volunteering at Projekt DA-SEIN, she began attending other church events and expressed a sense of affiliation to the church through the Offene Kirche Elisabethen.⁵⁸

In fact, many people know about the Offene Kirche Elisabethen first through its activities in the city and only second as a church. Many are first attracted to the

53 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1EI_IN, Pos. 123.

54 Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel,” 57.

55 Hungerbühler, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Basel,” 58.

56 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1EI_IN, Pos. 215.

57 Interview by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, January 15, 2019: 20190115_1EI_IN, Pos. 101.

58 Participant Observation by Katherine Kunz, Basel, Switzerland, May 22, 2018: 20180522_Freiwilligensitzung_DO, Pos. 10.

church through its volunteer opportunities or its cultural offerings. These entry points make it a “young” church, in contrast to the aging congregations of many churches. In a survey conducted by the program, one young volunteer stated that many of their peers no longer connect to church, yet the OKE offers something important that church had provided in his past.

In my circle of friends, the church does not play a role. But I still believe that people are always looking for community with other people with whom they can talk, exchange ideas, and do projects. The OKE is a place where you can meet and unite all interests, because everything is accepted and tolerated. When I go to church in my village there are only old people because the young just don't feel connected anymore.⁵⁹

This focus on community over denominational or even religious attributes reflects the OKE's post-denominational stance. The church hopes to create a broad community, cutting across divisions, in order to minister in a climate of changing religiosity.

Beate Hofmann points out that civic organizations, including churches, are experiencing a shift from membership to participation models. Hofmann lists five characteristics of this new form of civic engagement.⁶⁰ The first aspect is a strong orientation toward content and concrete work instead of toward the organization and its worldview. Instead of joining an organization because of a belief in the mission and overall program, people choose to engage because of specific programs, which are often connected with concrete tasks and outcomes. This is seen in those attracted to the Offene Kirche Elisabethen as volunteers at Projekt DA-SEIN or as attendees at specific events and programs.⁶¹ Second, people make engagement a conscious decision, not just a familiar part of a tradition. Instead of being involved in church because of family, social, and religious traditions, people choose church activities out of a menu of other social and community organizations and projects.⁶² Third, the orientation of volunteers has shifted from an altruistic focus to a focus on one's own interests and causes. The driving force of involvement is no longer helping others but acting on one's personal beliefs and commitments. This was reflected in Projekt DA-SEIN volunteers, many of whom are already connected to migration experiences and oriented toward spaces of diversity. Fourth, changes in how people engage with organizations have shifted participation from long-term commit-

59 Projekt DA-SEIN, *DA-SEIN Interview: DA-SEIN und JUNG-SEIN Freiwillige* (Projekt DA-SEIN, 2018).

60 Beate Hofmann, “Ehrenamt und Freiwilligkeit,” in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 144–45.

61 Pohl-Patalong, “Kirche bei neuen Gelegenheiten,” 199–202.

62 Hofmann, “Ehrenamt und Freiwilligkeit.”

ments to time- and scope-limited engagements with certain initiatives, projects, and actions. This more individualized involvement means people might connect to a church through one offering, but not participate in other programs or services and may come and go more readily.⁶³

Finally, people's involvement in civil society has shifted from a willingness to be part of a hierarchical structure to a desire to co-create the engagement field. This greater participation, both by volunteers and by community members, means that the church and its programs reflect not only the theological commitments of the church but also the interests of participants. This is reflected in the rise in volunteer positions at churches like the OKE.⁶⁴ Like many City Churches, the OKE operates outside of traditional congregational structures and relies in diverse and structured ways on volunteers. The pastoral staff manages the space and leads many of the religious offerings, but much of the work of the church and its outreach programs are carried out by volunteers. The OKE's volunteers include people of diverse ages, from university students to retired community members, and diverse religious and cultural affiliations. At Projekt DA-SEIN volunteers range from those without religious affiliation, to practicing Christians of various denominations, to Jews, to Muslims.⁶⁵ In the church's 2017 annual report, over 60 volunteers were engaged in its programmatic work.⁶⁶

4.2.2 Openness

Keeping the church open is central to the mission of the OKE and, on a basic level, means that that church space remains open to visitors. Throughout the week, church doors remain unlocked, and the sanctuary is open for people to enter. The space is configured to have multiple uses and accommodate frequent visitors. When the OKE was established, the inside of the church was renovated with these goals in

63 Pohl-Patalong, "Kirche bei neuen Gelegenheiten," 204.

64 Jan Hermelink, "Pfarrberuf und Pfarramt," in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchener Theologie, 2014). In addition, professional ministry positions have become more diverse, demanding a wider range of skills from clergy. Clergy are expected to be able to fulfill more and diverse tasks and more leadership responsibilities rest on volunteers.

65 Muslim volunteers are often refugees or asylum-seekers who have participated in Projekt DA-SEIN or similar programs.

66 Bahnhofkirche Zürich, *Jahresbericht 2018* (reformiert_katholisch: Kirchen im Kanton Zürich, 2019), 9, 11. This reliance on volunteers is even more pronounced in other Swiss City Churches. The Offene Kirche Bern recorded 338 volunteers in 2018. Of these, 65 volunteers worked in "presence ministry" (*Präsenzdienst*), to staff the church when it is open. The church's ministry of presence kept the church open for 4,134 hours in 2018 (for 42,917 visitors; in all over 68,000 people took part in some program or visited the church in 2018).

mind: most of the pews were removed and replaced with chairs, the floors were leveled, restrooms were added, and the north entrance was converted into a café.

At a missional level, the church is open to all people regardless of religious beliefs, church affiliation, or social and legal status, and this reflects the OKE's commitment to addressing the spiritual, cultural, and social concerns of all people of Basel. In the 2012 mission statement (*Grundsatzpapier*) this openness is explained in terms of an aim to welcome all people: "Men and women, singles, pairs, and families, different sexual orientations and life paths, different religious and non-religious backgrounds – all of these belong to life, enrich humanity and expand and open the space of the church."⁶⁷ The OKE is open to the diversity of people, concerns, and interests in the city of Basel and is committed to being a place for all people in the city.

Openness can also be understood as accessibility. The physical building of the OKE is accessible to people and the church seeks to make its religious offerings accessible to different people and beliefs. An openness to social and political realities in the city and its wider population is also a characteristic of public theology, which puts religion in conversation with social, cultural, and political issues.⁶⁸ As Swiss theologian Thomas Schlag writes, public theology is less a specific ideology and more an attempt to take seriously the complexity of the theological-social-ethical realities in political, economic, and individual spheres.⁶⁹ In order to engage this complexity, public theology also develops language that is accessible to people outside of the Christian tradition.⁷⁰ More accessible language addresses common concerns across a population, such as the entire population of a city, more directly and broadly. South African public theologian John de Gruchy defines seven aspects of public theology for churches to consider, including developing language for people both inside and outside of the church.⁷¹ The OKE's mission statements, while using some religious terms, strive to broaden their language and to connect to spiritual, social, and political concerns, regardless of religious context.⁷²

The OKE's openness extends beyond physical and spiritual openness. It also includes openness to life events, moods, perspectives, and emotions. These affective

67 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Grundsatzpapier*.

68 Thomas Schlag, "Öffentliche Kirche," in *Handbuch für Kirchen- und Gemeindeentwicklung*, ed. Ralph Kunz and Thomas Schlag (Neukirchener Theologie, 2014), 180.

69 Schlag, "Öffentliche Kirche."

70 Schlag, "Öffentliche Kirche," 181.

71 John de Gruchy, "Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring the Genre," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1, no. 1 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1163/156973207X194466>. Other aspects of public theology, according to Gruchy, are having knowledge about public issues, prioritizing those who are marginalized, and cultivating a lived experience of God.

72 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Die Grundsätze der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen*; Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Grundsatzpapier*.

experiences are described in some OKE contexts with the term “ambivalence.” For example, the 2012 *Grundsatzpapier* begins:

Life is shaped by ambivalence: celebration and dance next to mourning and suffering. Sickness and healing, laughing and crying – an abundance of feelings, experiences and situations. This abundance of life has a place in the Offene Kirche Elisabethen, in events, celebrations, in conversations, and in spiritual care, on different occasions.⁷³

Ambivalence refers to the range of emotions that animate a life, such as joy, grief, confusion, delight. These experiences of mixed or conflicting feelings can exist side-by-side. Ambivalence, in this context, means welcoming what is present, whether grief or celebration, laughing or crying.⁷⁴ It does not necessarily seek resolution but sees these affective associations as reflecting the abundance and complexity of life and seeks to create space for all of it. Ambivalence is open to contradictions, discomfort, and conflicting experiences and feelings. Here, ambivalence is understood not in negative terms, as the inability to make a choice, but as a necessary place of tension, especially when diverse people and experiences meet and interact, such as in convivial encounters.

4.2.3 Convivence

The 1994 mission statement (*Grundsatzpapier*) of the OKE notes that the church wants to listen to the people’s concerns and what is important to them. Instead of founding a church parish, it will be a “low threshold” church that practices hospitality and is a place where groups can meet with their social, cultural, and religious concerns and learn together with their differences.⁷⁵ The statement further describes its mission as a “learning mutual process” where all participants co-create and contribute. For the OKE, its missional focus is the population of the city, Christian or otherwise. Instead of a program of evangelization and changing the other, the OKE focuses on building communities across difference.

This perspective draws from theologian Theo Sundermeier’s “hermeneutic of difference” and his related concept of convivence. Convivence (*convivencia* in Spanish

73 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Grundsatzpapier*.

74 The theme of ambivalence is reflected in two biblical verses at the beginning the mission statement. The first verse is from the Gospel of John; “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10 NRSV). The second verse is from Proverbs (an edited version of Proverbs 9:1–6 NRSV). “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has also set her table and calls, come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed, and live and walk in the way of insight.”

75 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Die Grundsätze der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen*.

and *Konvivenz* in German) is a practice of creating community with others instead of for others.⁷⁶ Historically, *convivencia* referred to the living together of different religions in medieval Spain.⁷⁷ The term was used contemporarily in liberation theology and means “living with others”; it “emphasizes the priority of practice over theory and prefers experience over insight.”⁷⁸ Convivencia can be understood as being together in communities of learning, helping, and celebrating that engage in ordinary activities of living in community. This central concept of living together focuses on everyday activities and celebrations. Social scientists Magdalena Nowicka and Steven Vertovec, who explored how conviviality is understood in a variety of academic disciplines, write: “Based on the Latin roots for ‘with’ and ‘living,’ the term ‘conviviality’ has long been associated with sociable, friendly and festive traits.”⁷⁹ Through shared experiences, the goal is to participate in equal contributions of learned and lived knowledge.

Theological conviviality is described by Sundermeier’s “hermeneutic of difference,” also known as an “intercultural hermeneutic.”⁸⁰ Sundermeier’s use of convivencia grows out of this hermeneutic and reframes mission away from textual understandings. Instead, he outlines an understanding of the other that evolves out of mutual respect, encounter, and learning.⁸¹ This hermeneutic is not about understanding but about being mutually changed. Sundermeier’s hermeneutic is grounded in experiences of the common life; it is grounded not in seeking knowledge about the other, but in being challenged, questioned, and enriched by the other.⁸² Sundermeier understands convivencia as being *with* people, not *for* people. Theologian Richard Bliese describes Sundermeier’s convivencia as being open to all people, even outside of the Christian church. “The church, for Sundermeier, should open up its invitation to the banquet table of the Lord – even to non-Christians – because this is the very nature of the eschatological meal.”⁸³ The OKE reflects this willingness to embrace a diversity of people as well as the ambivalences and challenges of being church “with others.”

76 Sundermeier and Küster, *Konvivenz und Differenz*.

77 Jewish Museum, *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain* (Braziller, 1992).

78 Bliese, “Convivenz and Globalization,” 235.

79 Magdalena Nowicka and Steven Vertovec, “Comparing Convivialities: Dreams and Realities of Living-with-Difference,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, no. 4 (2014): 341, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413510414>.

80 Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen: Eine praktische Hermeneutik*, Sammlung Vandenhoeck (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 183.

81 Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen*; David W. Congdon, “Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics: Interpreting Theo Sundermeier’s Differenzhermeneutik,” *Mission Studies* 33, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341444>.

82 Congdon, “Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics,” 2.

83 Bliese, “Convivenz and Globalization,” 237.

In particular, the 1994 mission statement (*Grundsatzpapier*) draws a contrast between Sundermeier's model of church "with others" and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's model of church "for others." It states that the Offene Kirche Elisabethen "is not a church for others (Dietrich Bonhoeffer), but instead a church with others. The church does not work *for* those in need, but *with* those in need."⁸⁴ In the aftermath of the Second World War, churches took up an idea, first articulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that the church should shift its focus from converting non-believers to serving others.⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer writes in *Letters and Papers from Prison*: "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."⁸⁶ This theology, known as Pro-Existence, advocated for a church for others, instead of a church oriented exclusively towards its members. This shift to Pro-Existence, or working "for others," was a well-intentioned corrective but set up a hierarchical dynamic that precluded solidarity, reciprocity, and collaboration between communities. Sundermeier offered an alternative, known as the Con-Existence model and based on conviviality, which shifted the focus to working and living with others.⁸⁷

Outside of the church, convivence is recognized as critical to civil society, especially through shared interactions and practices in cities where there are high levels of diversity. These everyday encounters of convivence bring people together without the goal of changing something, fixing something, or becoming something different. Instead, everyday interactions build a sense of community. Sociologists found,

84 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, *Die Grundsätze der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen*.

85 Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer Als Öffentlicher Theologe," *Evangelische Theologie* 69, no. 5 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.14315/evth-2009-69-5-329>; Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, "Öffentliche Kirche in Den Herausforderungen Der Zeit," *Evangelische Theologie* 79, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.14315/evth-2019-790104>. The relevance of the political and social engagement of the church took on a new urgency in the wake of World War II. Particularly in the German-speaking world (understood as Germany, Austria, and the German-speaking parts of Switzerland), the legacy of the German church's overwhelming silence in the face of the Third Reich weighed heavily on post-war theology. The work of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed for his involvement in the July 20, 1944, attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler, addressed the need for the church to take on greater responsibility in the world. His theology, known as Pro-Existence, advocated for a church for others, instead of for the church and its members exclusively. This focus on the world beyond the church, as well as Bonhoeffer's political actions, which were motivated by his religious convictions, and his subsequent murder, led many theologians to insist that after Bonhoeffer there could no longer be an apolitical church or theologies.

86 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller, rev. Frank Clarke et al., 3rd ed. (SCM Press Ltd, 1967).

87 Sundermeier and Küster, *Konvivenz und Differenz*.

in their research in diverse communities in the U.K., that in the practice of convivence, “the elective coming together of often ethnically diverse others, over time, in places, to do leisure ‘things’ meant these organizations could work as generative spaces of social interaction and shared practice through and in contexts of urban difference.”⁸⁸ This definition of conviviality could be a descriptor of the work of the OKE, including Projekt DA-SEIN. In offering a space that is open to people of different religious and social backgrounds, the OKE creates possibilities for everyday, generative connections.

4.3 Projekt DA-SEIN

In 2014, the Offene Kirche Elisabethen launched Projekt DA-SEIN, an outreach program for recently arrived asylum-seekers and refugees.⁸⁹ At that time, the church provided a wide range of spiritual and cultural offerings while recognizing a need to grow their social offerings. Concurrently, migration became a culturally salient phenomenon in Basel and throughout Europe, with an increase in asylum-seeking to Europe. The OKE identified those who had recently arrived and applied for asylum as part of the Basel community and, as a church committed to being open to all members of the local population, it saw a need to include asylum-seekers in their outreach and programming.

The creation of Projekt DA-SEIN is both a reflection of the church’s openness to all people in Basel and part of a larger religious response to the social and political realities of migration. Many religious denominations and organizations responded to the increase in migration at that time. Among Christian churches, this response was motivated by an emphasis on the importance of service to those in need and a theological resonance with themes of migration, exile, and loss.⁹⁰ As a City Church committed to the social, cultural, and religious life of Basel, the OKE was especially poised to respond to this shift in migration with theological and social offerings.

In particular, the OKE response to those who left their homes and arrived in Basel as asylum-seekers was the creation of Projekt DA-SEIN. When designing the program, instead of creating a specific programmatic structure, the leadership team opted to create a more open space of encounter. The project is largely unstructured

88 Sarah Neal et al., “Community and Conviviality? Informal Social Life in Multicultural Places,” *Sociology* 53, no. 1 (2019): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038518763518>.

89 Anette Stade, DA-SEIN: *Ankommen, Dabeisein, Mitgestalten – Ein Angebot für Asylsuchende in Basel* (KAITO; Im Auftrag der Christoph Merian Stiftung CMS und der Offene Kirche Elisabethen (OKE), 2014). The translation of the document title reads: “DA-SEIN: Arrive, be together, and create together – an offering for asylum-seekers in Basel.”

90 For more information about Christian responses to migration, exile, and loss, see Chapter 2, section 2.3.3.

and seeks to go beyond meeting basic needs; instead it draws on the church's theology to prioritize building community. The program is designed to offer a space of convivial gathering where affective encounters might occur, where learning together might be prioritized, and where diverse experiences might be welcomed despite differences and challenges. In doing this, Projekt DA-SEIN intends to create a place for refugees and asylum-seekers to gather and experience a sense of home in Basel. The description on the Offene Kirche Elisabethen website states: "In the program DA-SEIN, refugees can find a piece of home away from home."⁹¹ While home is not explicitly defined at Projekt DA-SEIN, Chapter 6 considers how aspects of the Offene Kirche Elisabethen and Projekt DA-SEIN reflect social and theological elements of home that shape the "piece of home" offered for asylum-seekers. The church's unique combination of theological and social commitments, the influence of local Swiss values, and the personal experiences brought by volunteers and staff offer a particular expression of home at Projekt DA-SEIN.

During my time at the program, asylum-seekers arrived from a range of countries, with the two largest groups being from Afghanistan and Eritrea. There were also asylum-seekers from Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Tibet, Sudan, Nigeria, Turkey, and other countries. The majority were men under the age of 30, but there were also women, children, and older men. The OKE also developed two parallel programs to Projekt DA-SEIN, mirroring the goal of connecting asylum-seekers and Swiss residents of Basel. Projekt JUNG-SEIN targeted asylum-seekers and refugees between the ages of 18 and 25, with the specific goal of connecting them with peers in the Swiss community. This program occurred on Friday and Saturday afternoons and had more programmatic elements, including sports and cultural events. It lost funding in the fall of 2018 and participants were absorbed into the Projekt DA-SEIN program. In the spring of 2018, Projekt FRAU-SEIN was launched. It met one day a week and was open only to women. The leadership of Projekt DA-SEIN felt this program was important, as many women did not feel comfortable attending the majority-male Projekt DA-SEIN. Attendance was lower at Projekt FRAU-SEIN and included more children, as women were encouraged to bring them. The focus reflected convivial goals while also involving more organized activities, such as conversation circles, cooking demonstrations, and events like yoga or bringing children to the local swimming pool.

4.4 An Open Church in Basel

The Offene Kirche Elisabethen occupies a unique place in the city of Basel. It is rooted in the historic Evangelical-Reformed and Roman Catholic churches of Basel and it

91 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, "Die Offene Kirche Elisabethen (OKE)."

occupies the first Reformed church built in Basel after the Reformation – this church was financed by Christoph Merian, who was from a prominent aristocratic family in Basel.⁹² Yet, in the face of changing demographics and membership patterns, and with the church building largely unoccupied, the OKE was established in the 1990s as a place of welcome for all members of the Basel community. Inspired by the City Church movement in Europe, Hansruedi Felix, the founder of the OKE, created a vision for an “open church” that would bring together different people and cultures with religious and secular offerings.⁹³ The OKE creates a space that is beyond distinct church membership, and it even calls itself post-denominational. It centers openness in physical spaces, religious affiliations, and affective experiences. Openness and convivial interactions characterize many of the OKE’s programs and offerings. In the case of Projekt DA-SEIN, asylum-seekers who live in and around Basel are invited to be together at the church and learn from and with one another and volunteers. Everyday activities, such as playing games, sharing meals, and engaging in conversation, are the heart of Projekt DA-SEIN and are more important than programmatic elements. This openness and this convivial structure make room for affective experiences that build connections between people and places. In Chapter 6, I will explore how Projekt DA-SEIN builds on the OKE’s commitments to openness and convivence to offer a “piece of home” to asylum-seekers in Basel.

92 Offene Kirche Elisabethen, “Offene Kirche Elisabethen Geschichte.”

93 Felix, “Der Anfang der Offenen Kirche Elisabethen.”

