Belonging Together in Diversity
Practices of Belonging and Boundary Making in Convivial Intercultural-Ecumenical Partnerships

Esther Maria Meyer

1 Convivial Intercultural-Ecumenical Partnerships[1]

"Worldwide ecumenism often happens directly in your neighborhood," writes the network of Protestant Churches of Germany (EKD) on their homepage, addressing their cooperation with international congregations.[2] Although international congregations have been part of the local church landscape since the Reformation, forms of ecumenical dialogue were developed after World War II without the participation of most Protestant international congregations. It was not until the 1990s that these congregations were perceived as ecumenical partners. Relationships established until then were often social-diaconal, with migration churches and their members understood as aid recipients (Dümling 2018: 85). Starting with the new millennium, ecumenical worship services were also consciously celebrated with Protestant international congregations, and new forms of dialogue were developed. These changes made it possible to experience the variety of global Christianity that existed "in the neighborhood". While previous forms of ecumenical dialogue worked from a model of a cross-denominational community, due to migra-

---

1   This chapter is related to author's dissertation project, "(Doing) Belonging together in Diversity. Eine theologisches Programm convivialer, migrationsökumenischer Partnerschaften am Fallbeispiel des interkulturellen Kirchenzentrum Mannheims".

2   In research as well as in church practice different terminologies are used. In the following, according to the recommendation of the Conference of Commissioners for Work with Congregations of Other Languages and Origins in the Regional Churches and Ministries in the EKD (KA-GaSH), I use the term "international congregations", since "the members feel at home in Germany and at the same time are connected with other regions of the world. Thus they become links between different nationalities and bridge builders of worldwide Christianity" (https://internationale-gemeinden.de/was-verstehen-wir-unter-einer-internationalen-gemeinde/). For a discussion of the various terms Hoffmann 2020: 13–16. Further, the term used is "intercultural ecumenism" rather than "migration ecumenism". Here, the formulation from the church practice at the *Friedenskirche* Mannheim is used.

tion, questions arose about how to acknowledge the local variety of churches and express unity at the same time (Hoffmann 2021: 13).

Another specific feature of some intercultural-ecumenical partnerships is that these partnerships are established, not only through forms of dialogue and local worship services on certain occasions such as Pentecost, but also by sharing the same church building. Many of the international congregations do not own a church building. Especially after the founding of a congregation, financial resources are usually limited. While some congregations start gathering in private spaces, others decide to celebrate their services in a church from the beginning. As the congregation grows to a certain size, the rental of a suitable space is usually necessary. Therefore, international congregations often rent a church building from an autochthonous congregation. The lease may give rise to a partnership that extends beyond the rental of the premises. Therefore, these partnerships are not only ecumenical (through the community built between different denominations) and intercultural (through the use of different languages and the encounter of different cultural expressions of the Christian faith), they also "live under one roof". Therefore, in addition to theological discussions and the celebration of joint worship services, the negotiation of organizational concerns is also part of these partnerships. For example, schedules and timing need to be negotiated when several congregations celebrate their services one after the other. In discussions regarding the use of the place, the hierarchy between the individual congregations is indirectly negotiated. Research on intercultural ecumenism has thus far focused on the elements of an intercultural worship service (Liturgische Konferenz 2020; Bieler 2008) and possible areas where the participants can learn from each other (Hoffmann 2021; Etzelmüller 2022). The particularities, themes, and forms of community that arise from sharing the church building have rarely been considered, even though the practice of renting a church is relatively common. Only Claudia Hoffmann (2020) has developed a model of four basic types of partnerships between international congregations and autochthonous congregations which considers the practice of sharing one place: The *rental model* describes partnerships that occur through the rental of a place and where no further cooperation emerges. These communities often remain strangers to each other (76–78). This is different in *project-based partnerships* where, for events such as church services or street missions, congregations work together toward a common goal. This joint project can also be social-diaconal or include material support (78–80). In the *integration model*, the congregations merge into one, whereby the international congregation is absorbed into the autochthonous congregation (80–81). In the *partnership model*, a new congregation is created in which elements from both congregations merge into one (81–93).

Another model is developed at the *Friedenskirche* in Mannheim, Germany, known as the Intercultural Church Center in Mannheim. The *ChristusFriedenGemeinde*, a congregation of the Protestant mainline church of Baden, rents the *Friedenskirche* and its premises to five other congregations: the (Korean) Agape congregation (PROK), the (Ethiopian) Maranatha congregation, the PC Mannheim (Presbyterian Church of Cameroon), the Hungarian Protestant congregation of Baden, and the Arab-Christian congregation of Mannheim/Ludwigshafen. All congregations remain independent and usually celebrate their worship services one after the other. Yet together they still form a community. These partnerships are based on the leases but also extend beyond them. Included in the

rental agreement are regular gatherings: All congregations worship together three times a year. The congregational leaders meet ten times a year to prepare upcoming services, exchange information between the congregations, and discuss organizational matters. Further, the partnerships are not project-based but are designed to remain in existence beyond individual projects. By sharing the church space, parishioners from each congregation see each other between services. I define the practice of sharing the church and the themes that arise from this sharing as convivial. This adjective derives from the Latin *convivere* (to live together). At the Intercultural Church Center in Mannheim, there are ephemeral as well as planned and ritualized encounters: The meetings of representatives of all congregations and the common church services are planned in advance. Yet, the encounters during the joint intercultural church service can be ephemeral, while also having a ritual element. During the festivities that follow the intercultural worship services, ephemeral but also in-depth encounters between parishioners of all congregations often occur. Between the congregations' worship services ephemeral encounters also take place. The adjective *convivial* thus encompasses all encounters that arise within the church partnerships through sharing the church building. *Convivial* expresses that a community is created by sharing the church space, but that the congregations also remain independent. These *convivial* partnerships are, in my opinion, another possible form of intercultural-ecumenical partnerships.[3]

For the study of these partnerships, the concept of conviviality serves as a basic heuristic. The concept has been established in migration research for the study of super-diverse communities. Conviviality is no longer understood as hospitality or successful community (Cambridge dictionary: "conviviality"), but as "a process of cohabitation and interaction" (Gilroy 2004: ix). Thus, the concept of conviviality establishes a counterpoint to the concept of multiculturalism. The focus is thus on the processes of negotiation and the shaping of shared space rather than on the peaceful coexistence of different cultural groups. Gilroy's concept was used for empirical studies in migration research. Here, the term conviviality describes non- and partially-institutionalized, diverse spaces that emerge by sharing places such as neighborhoods or marketplaces. In these contexts, informal and everyday togetherness, i.e. "the process of living with difference" (Heil 2020: 21) through shared spaces, is the subject of convivial research. Negotiations, translations, cooperation, conflicts, and outcomes as well as the avoidance of these encounters are studied. These are understood in ethnomethodology as practices that reveal generalities about sociality (ibid: 17). Through these themes, the underlying logics of topics such as demarcation, representation, belonging, and cultural diffusion emerge (ibid: 19–20). At the same time, by considering conflicts, hierarchies, and demarcations, social reality is presented as dynamic and ambivalent. The ephemeral encounters between members of different congregations have not yet been part of the ecumenical discourse. Following the ethnomethodological assumptions of conviviality research, these are also places where communities emerge or dissipate.

---

3   This is related to the repertoire of convivial interactions, see Bieler in this volume.

2   Dynamics of Boundary Making and Community Building[4]

But how do the convivial, intercultural ecumenical partnerships at the Intercultural Church Center in Mannheim differ from non-convivial partnerships? Since the congregations remain independent, but at the same time form a cross-congregational community, there exists a twofold dynamic in the partnership. On the one hand, the congregations open up to each other, exchange ideas, and celebrate joint worship services. In the meetings of congregation leaders, they negotiate how the community can succeed and how rituals can be shaped interculturally. Also, future possible projects are discussed. Furthermore, members of the congregations that celebrate their worship services after each other see each other every Sunday. Contacts that are made during the joint intercultural services and subsequent celebrations can be deepened by these encounters. Often people know each other "by sight".

On the other hand, the congregations create boundaries to remain independent. In contrast to intercultural dialogues or project-oriented partnerships, this is not just a matter of articulating differences in tradition and beliefs. Rather, it is a matter of negotiating what each congregation can bring to the intercultural encounters. The resources that can be spent on the inter-congregational community, and the desire to spend them in certain ways, are different for each congregation. At the same time, it is important on a practical level to allow other congregations to have the space they need and to leave the church or parish hall clean and on time. When congregations have special events, the rooms cannot be used for longer than agreed without making additional arrangements since the other congregations will have to postpone their services. But what kind of community emerges from the dynamics outlined here between boundary making and community building? And can aspects of conviviality bring new perspectives to the ecumenical discussion?

To answer these questions, I follow the ethnomethodological approach of Heils' conviviality research (Nowicka/Vertorec 2014; Neal/Bennett/Allan 2019; Wise/Noble 2016; Heil 2015). Ethnomethodology assumes that social systems can be reconstructed through practices. It is assumed that the values found in relationships and the systems and hierarchies within a community are revealed through their practices (Garfinkel 1974: 15–18). The following descriptions of the congregations are based on the analysis of the data material I collected as part of my ethnographic doctoral project from the end of 2020 to the beginning of 2023 at the Intercultural Church Center at the *Friedenskirche* in Mannheim. During this time, I participated in meetings of congregation leaders,

---

4   This term implies the German concept of *Vergemeinschaftung* and should therefore be translated as community, a term that has not yet established itself in Anglo-American sociology, but has only been translated by German-speaking social scientists (e.g. Hepp et al. 2014). In the concept of *Vergemeinschaftung* the focus is on the process of relationship creation that can lead to a community, not on the implied goal of the community. Max Weber described communization as a process in which, in the end, social action is based on subjectively felt (affective or traditional) togetherness of the participants (Weber 1922: 21). The various processes outlined below show the diversity of this belonging. It becomes clear that communities can overlap and influence each other.

church services of the congregations, and joint intercultural services as well as subsequent celebrations. I collected documents and recorded notes on conversations, services, and encounters. I also conducted interviews, which were transcribed. The data were analyzed according to grounded theory so that phenomena that recur and are relevant to different kinds of encounters could be identified.

To answer these questions about conviviality, I would like to place the *silences of the social* (*Schweigsamkeit des Sozialen*) (Hirschauer 2001) at the center of this chapter. The ethnographer Stephan Hirschhauer defines the "silent of the social" as, in addition to materiality, situational knowledge or implicit knowledge that is often not verbalized (443). Thus, a dense description of a scene between two church services forms the basis of the following discussion. In the described scene, processes of negotiation take place, which largely happen through situational and implicit knowledge and which I then reconstruct interpretatively. Thus, I explore the ephemeral, which often remains silent, as well as its importance for convivial migration-ecumenical partnerships.

I first present two practices of boundary making and then two practices of community building. The instances of boundary making are first, to have space for one's community and second, occur because communities do not yet know each other. The instances of community building are first, communication that occurs through encounters and, second, communication practices that assume an implied community. I illustrate these practices through a thick description[5] of events and interactions between two worship services. Since convivial partnerships also include other forms of encounter, I also add observations from meetings between community leaders and at joint worship services, thus condensing the analysis. In the end, I summarize the results and describe the form of community that emerges. Based on these results I discuss whether considering aspects of conviviality offers a new perspective for intercultural ecumenism.

2.1 Between Two Services – a Thick Description

It is a Sunday afternoon in late autumn. The PC Mannheim is celebrating its worship service. The members of the PC Mannheim sit and walk through the first seven rows of pews. The final prayer and blessing have just been said and during the final song all the parishioners walk up to each other in the center aisle and the pews, hugging each other and wishing each other a "Happy Sunday." The children join in with gusto. Further back in the penultimate row of pews sit Aaron and Dalia,[6] members of the Mannheim/Ludwigshafen Christian Arab congregation. Their congregation's service starts in an hour. They came early to set everything up for the final rehearsals and entered the church just before the prayer was said, before the blessing. While they are waiting, they pray with the congregation during the last prayer. While the closing song is sung, they watch from the back. When the song

---

5 Thick description is a method of cultural studies with which social practice can be textually recorded. It is based on various observations and protocols of comparable scenes. The protocols are viewed contrastively in an analysis stage. In doing so, recurring themes emerge through different facets. These are worked out in their nuances and developed into theses. With the help of these theses, the insights gained in the analysis can be presented in an exploratory way. (Geertz 1999; Kalender 2023: 109–125)

6 The names of the people in this scene have been anonymized through the use of pseudonyms in this chapter.

ends, Jeremiah, a member from the Mannheim PC, stands up and takes a few steps down the center aisle toward Aaron, who is walking up the center aisle toward the altar. Although they do not know each other well, they give each other a fist bump. "How's it going?" asks Jeremiah. "Good. And for all challenges, the Lord gives me strength," Aaron replies. Jeremiah gives him a quick pat on the back, "Amen. I couldn't have said it better." Aaron and Dalia walk through the sanctuary to the sacristy and then on to the fellowship halls to retrieve the technical equipment for their congregation's service. Meanwhile, the chairman of PC Mannheim who is standing next to the sanctuary, calls into the room that there is something to be cleared up about celebrations during Advent. The adult members of the congregation turn to him. Some walk a few steps toward him. The kids run around the church. The chairman begins to share the information and a small discussion ensues. Meanwhile, other parishioners from the Christian Arab community come into the church and sit down in the middle pews on the other side of the church. They exchange glances with the members of PC Mannheim. Later, they will sit further toward the front. Two young women enter the church and walk purposefully toward the sanctuary. They exchange glances with the members of PC Mannheim. Dalia and Aaron are just now coming back. They carry speakers and a box with cables and microphones. The four greet each other in Arabic and with a hug and then leave again through the sacristy. In the meantime, the PC Mannheim discusses the open questions regarding the Advent service. Their members pack up. As a group, they leave the church. On the way out, the seated members of the Arab-Christian congregation and the PC Mannheim nod to each other.

3   The Need to Have Space for The Congregation and a Lack of Acquaintances: Practices of Boundary Making and Demarcation

Boundary making practices have become an increasingly popular analytical tool in sociology in recent years and are used to study sociality and groups (Nagel in this volume). Through the approach of boundary making, the practices of demarcation are examined. This process reconstructs the relationality of a group through their practices (Lamont and Molnar 2002:169). In this context, identity markers are no longer understood as reasons for group membership. Identity markers are characteristics that appear relevant within society, such as gender, nationality, or religion. The associated concept of identity assumes a stable homogeneous group of individuals with the same social markers. However, this identification can be called into question (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 5). With the approach of boundary making, the naming of identity markers as justification for group membership is only one of many tools. Following this approach, I do not presuppose that the congregations are social units but instead present practices that delineate one group from the others. In my opinion, two types of practices of boundary making can be observed in the scene described above: practices of boundary making that establish and maintain distance, and practices that indirectly demarcate people from each other by using shared rituals. Distance is maintained as Aaron and Dalia, as well as other members of the Christian Arab congregation Mannheim/Ludwigshafen, remain seated in the back rows. The members of the PC Mannheim, on the other hand, orient themselves to the front of the church. Due to this spatial separation, the interaction between the communities is limited. Likewise, the members' bodies do not face in the same direction, but are turned partially away from each other. The members of the Arab-Christian congre-

gation of Mannheim/Ludwigshafen orient themselves toward the sanctuary since they are setting up for the service. The members of the PC Mannheim orient themselves toward each other during this time, while they discuss concerns of their congregation. This creates two groups. These processes are reinforced by other practices that express closeness and connectedness within a congregation. Practices which imply physical closeness and are performed in the same way by all participants, can be observed among members of each congregation. The members of the PCC wish each other a "Happy Sunday" by hugging each other. The members of the Arab-Christian Congregation Mannheim/Ludwigshafen meet in the sanctuary and hug each other, too. Both interactions draw on previously negotiated relationships and rituals. Likewise, the members of the two communities speak to each other in Arabic or English. In those practices not only is connectedness expressed, but at the same time the members of each congregation demarcate themselves from members of the other congregation. It is clear who belongs to the group and who does not.

In later conversations, two reasons were mentioned for these demarcation practices: On the one hand, communities need space for their congregational life. If we imagine this description as a scene, the people who are in the church interact in a way that makes them appear as two groups. They act side by side, thus creating social spaces, shaping them, and dissolving them again. In the process, not only are spaces of encounter within a group created but, as they are built up and dismantled, spaces of worship are also created. Drawing on Martina Löw's sociology of space, the term space is not limited to the architecture of place (Ketges and Bieler in this volume). Instead, this concept points to the arrangement of objects as well as the identification of the social setting through which the *place* becomes a *space* (Löw 2001: 158). Through the construction and dismantling of the described scene, *spaces of worship* are thus created and disappear. They are produced through the construction, that is, the arrangement of artifacts, and through certain congregational practices that are further shaped in the liturgy, and finally dissolved again. The behavior of those who construct the space changes at different stages: People who come into the church during the worship service do not walk around and greet everyone as they might do during the setup of a service (unless it is part of their liturgy or congregational practice). Following the worship service, the practices of "being a congregation" take place, further developing the *worship space* into the space of each congregation. Togetherness is expressed through physical closeness, positive wishes, and greetings. There are opportunities to engage in personal ways with other congregants and to speak a shared language. Likewise, at these moments, future events or community decisions are discussed, voted on, or planned. This demarcation protects aspects of congregational life in which the concerns of the congregation can find a place. In conversations with congregation members, I was often told about the benefits of celebrating church services in one's mother tongue and with people who share the same cultural background. The parishes are also perceived as places where people receive help to integrate into Germany. The passing on of "one's own culture"[7] (Protocol_MM_GD I) to their children was also mentioned as important. The communities thus create a space in which practices,

---

7   The quote "Die eigene Kultur weitergeben" is translated into English for this chapter. It was said in an informal talk after the worship service.

values, and language can be shared with others. These practices often find limited space in everyday life. The congregations thus become a safe space, as the pastor of the Korean Agape congregation said (Protocol_Interview AG I). From this value arises the reciprocal concern to give the other congregations space. The need to give each other space happens practically, as seen here between the services, but also metaphorically: In the preparation for worship services, demarcation takes place when the congregation reaches the limits of its resources. For example, in the case of a vacancy of the pastorate or when an important event for the church occurs on the same day, the leaders of a congregation may communicate that they cannot take over a part of the joint service. Participation in intercultural meetings and worship services is self-imposed and voluntary. The parishes help to shape the intercultural-ecumenical partnerships according to their respective goals, which may also be reflected in opportunities they refuse. At these moments, it is understood that the communities have other commitments or have otherwise used their resources. In this way, the communities also metaphorically give each other space.

On the other hand, it is difficult to connect if congregations do not know each other, which was a second reason given for demarcation practices. In the scene described above, the congregation members do not come into deeper contact with each other, even as the members of the PC Mannheim walk past the seated members of the Arab-Christian congregation. The challenge of connection is also visible in the joint worship services. During these gatherings, people demarcate themselves as a group by sitting with members of their own congregation in a pew and speaking to each other in their shared language. Thus, they also maintain physical distance from members of other congregations. The reason given for this is often a lack of acquaintances.

Despite these practices of demarcation, a cross-denominational community emerges at the Intercultural Church Center. In the following section, I identify two types of communalization practices. The first builds on the observation that the reason people do not come into contact is because they do not know each other. Greeting practices will be used to show how a sense of belonging can emerge. The second type of community building happens through the assumption of an existing, implied community.

4   From Negotiating the Communication Framework to Belonging Together: Practices of Community Building in Getting to Know Each Other

Despite the formation of different groups and worship spaces, as seen in the described scene, there are also interactions between members of different congregations. These moments include eye contact, greeting, and nodding. Seen in contrast, these encounters appear like chains of interaction that build on each other. The shortest form of interaction is eye contact. It is the perception of perception. In this perception of perception, the contact is negotiated nonverbally and in a brief moment and it is known whether the people want to maintain contact. A longer form of contact is nodding or smiling at each other. These are preceded by the perception of perception, which may be followed by an initial physical interaction – by a smile or with the whole body in a culturally influenced gesture of greeting. The latter can especially be understood as a socialized script that is performed intuitively. Thus, in different ways, recognition as a person is attributed to a

reciprocal recognition. The partner in the interaction is recognized as a person who is paid attention to and respected. In convivial spaces, research has shown that it is not only the communicated content that is important, but also the practices that make the other person feel perceived. In greeting practices, however, it is not only another person who is recognized, interculturality can also be negotiated (Heil 2020: 146). This is particularly evident in the intercultural services. In encounters between two people who have been socialized with different greeting practices, people become aware that different scripts are being enacted. In my research I recognized three strategies: (1) the adoption of the script of the other partner, which was often slightly changed. For example, the slight bowing and nodding in the Korean pastor's greeting was adopted by many, often with a handshake followed by a slight nod. (2) The performance of two separate formulas provides a context where both could be enacted. An example is a wave combined with a "Good to see you" that receives the response of a handshake followed by, "Yes. God bless you, sister/brother." (3) If the two people did not know each other, they used a short greeting that both parties share in everyday life, such as a nod with a "Hello" without getting into more of a conversation. Here, German served as the lingua franca. After two people exchange more words, they usually quickly switch languages, if it is one in which they can both express themselves better. This language would continue to be used in future encounters. Similar chains of interaction are found when people get to know each other, for example during the lunch after the joint worship services, when they start talking in the food queue. Again, it is first negotiated whether each one wants to connect by establishing eye contact and, if so, then in which way. If a conversation ensues, topics are "negotiated", and information is shared in small talk. Often what was experienced together in the service serves as a bridge to start the conversation before personal topics are shared. Nevertheless, there remains a fragility in all of these interactions that arises from the fact that so much needs to be negotiated. However, it is precisely in this uncertainty that space for interactions emerges, which includes adopting new practices in their own way (Heil 2020: 146), as exemplified in the gestures of greeting. This heuristic allows for a new understanding of the ephemeral spaces of encounter between services and during celebrations. Eye contact, greetings, and small talk can thus be seen not only as common interpersonal practices but also as foundational elements of convivial spaces and partnerships.

The repetition of meeting each other in the church spaces and the establishment of chains of interaction allows people get to know each other. In subsequent encounters, they can draw upon the established relationship: negotiated greeting rituals are repeated, topics from previous conversations are returned to, and in some cases, positive emotions from previous encounters are evoked. This reveals how one feels connected or has a sense of belonging together because people have known each other for a long time. Situations where relationship-building occur, such as the joint church services, but also during the meals that follow, and in some cases also expected agreements, were mentioned as connecting elements. According to Pfaff-Czarnecka, belonging can be defined as an "emotionally charged social location combining (1) perceptions and performance of commonality; (2) a sense of mutuality and more or less formalized modalities of collective allegiance, and (3) material and immaterial attachments that often result in a sense of entitlement" (Pfaff-Czernencka 2011: 2). In addition to shared experiences, social obli-

gations have a communalizing effect. The resulting community develops over time (ibid: 4). The concept of "belonging together" is used to describe a sociality that emerges from experiences of belonging. It connects people beyond the shared identity markers of a group, such as language or ethnic, national, or religious affiliation. Rather, belonging together happens through the "perceptions and performance of commonality" (ibid: 5) as experienced in the celebration of worship, the sharing of food, or the knowledge that one shares the same church space. Often these communities are a "less formalized modalit[y] of collective allegiance" (ibid: 5). This is also true for the Intercultural Church Center. In addition to the lease agreements, there is a joint theological framework agreement. It contains a relatively broad Christian belief statement as well as an agreement to support a structure that facilitates encounter through three worship services and additional meetings. Participation in all meetings, however, remains voluntary. Yet, it is through making acquaintances that the feeling of belonging emerges.

In this context, togetherness is reinforced by feelings of belonging to the church building itself. Church rooms are not only places of assembly but also places where congregations' relationships with God find expression. They are also places where important life cycle events occur, such as baptisms and weddings, or that provide spaces of retreat in difficult times. Over the years, the church becomes a familiar place where individuals feel comfortable. For example, some people shared in our conversations that they felt "at home" after years at the *Friedenskirche*. Practices that cultivate belonging include moving freely around the church space as well as caring for the space. Immediately sweeping and moping after a meal is not only a way of honoring a contract. Rather, it is also seen as self-evident because people feel responsible for the space. Belonging to a place also offers the possibility of being part of a larger community (Bennett 2012: 45). Thus, it can be stated that belonging to the Intercultural Church Center occurs through acquaintances and through a sense of belonging to the church building.

5   Imagined Communities: Practices of Community Building Through an Assumed Community

In addition to the communalization practices that emerge over time and by getting to know each other, there are practices of becoming community that already assume a community exists. For this, I would like to examine one section of the scene above in more detail:

> After a service, Jeremiah, an elder of the Mannheim PC, stands up and takes a few steps down the center aisle toward Aaron, a member of the Arab Christian congregation. Although they do not know each other well, they give each other a fist bump. "How are you?" asks Jeremiah. "Fine. And for all challenges, the Lord gives me strength," Aaron replies. Jeremiah gives him a quick pat on the back, "Amen. I couldn't have said it better."

Although the two men have only seen each other a few times, they interact with physical contact and relationship-intensifying questions. The question "How's it going?" presupposes a connection that does not need to be negotiated. And Aaron's response references

a relationship to God that they both hold: Instead of a simple "good", he adds a phrase of faith ("God gives me strength for all challenges."). Both, then, understand themselves to be in a relationship to each other that is connected through their faith. "Being a Christian" here, then, serves as an implied sociality that is not structurally imbued but enables practices of community building. Through the shared church space, each considers the other congregations to be Christian. Jeremiah's response, an assent to the belief expressed, creates the possibility (perhaps at a later time) to reconnect through a common belief, shared devotional language, and physical closeness. In this way, their connection as Christians is an imagined one. The concept of *imagined communities* was developed by sociologist Benedict Anderson as part of his research on the development of nationalism. Accordingly, imagined communities are communities that are perceived as social actors and thus have influence on negotiations and practices, but at the same time are imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991: 6–7). This concept, originally developed in reference to nationalities, can be adapted for the ecumenical idea of unity in Christ. Here, too, a sense of belonging is created, even if one does not know most of the "members" of the Christian community. Imagined communities are no different from structural communities in terms of their influence on the actions of individuals. Thus, practices can be identified that arise from a sense of belonging to the imagined community. At the Intercultural Church Center, an openness to others, through conversations and in praying for one another, were mentioned as actions that reflect their implied community as Christians. Through these practices, information is exchanged and relationships are emotionally deepened. In this way, conversation or intercession are also involved in community building.

In addition to engaging an imagined community, another communal practice takes place in intercultural worship that presupposes the community of those present. These communal practices often take place through the use of the pronoun "we". In prayers, songs, or sermons, the "we" implies that those present are a community. In this way, they are being reframed as community through these words. Through introductions ("We are now praying. You are welcome to stand up for this.") those present act in unison and thus experience a bodily, non-verbal act of community building (Meyer 2022: 96–99). Likewise, nonverbal communalization practices can be observed in bobbing, rocking, and singing along to songs. Both types of communization practices differ from those presented in the previous paragraph in that terms are not verbally negotiated, but practices are instead performed as if they are already a community or connected.

6 On the Simultaneity of Practices of Demarcation and Community Building – Belonging Together in Diversity

As described at the beginning of the chapter, I want not only to show practices of demarcation and community building but also to ask what kind of community emerges from the tension between them. Structurally, the community is grounded in agreements through leases for the building and within a theological framework agreement. In this

way, the community commits to participate in meetings and to work together. Likewise, the Nicene Creed is recognized by all communities (Czarnecka 2011:5). However, the thick description from my research shows that these structural frameworks do not necessarily mean that community practices between congregations and their members follow. Instead, congregation members demarcate themselves from one another between worship services. This occurs not only to give each other space but also because of their unfamiliarity with each other. This demarcation no longer takes place once people have gotten to know each other or insofar as an imagined community of Christians emerges. Both factors emerge in this process: Aaron and Jeremiah have seen each other before and get to know each other while ritualizing their connection through Christ.

It is also clear in the thick description that demarcation and being community always occur simultaneously: In my observations, some would demarcate themselves in groups while others would greet each other during the same event.

This simultaneity takes place not only between services but is also ritualized in the common intercultural services. I would like to give two examples of this: At the beginning of the intercultural services, the members of the individual congregations are asked by the welcoming pastor to stand up one after another, so that everyone knows who belongs to which congregation. For example, all the congregation members who belong to the Korean Agape congregation stand up first and sit down again. Then all those who belong to the PC Mannheim stand up and sit down, etc. After this initial greeting, all those who are present pray together. For this prayer, the people who are present assume different prayer postures. In the opening prayer the pronoun "we" is used. In this way, the individual groups are explicitly identified and then connected by a common action. In the intercessions, too, demarcation and unity occur simultaneously: Representatives of the congregations come forward in the sanctuary and stand in a semicircle. One after the other they come forward and pray in the language of their congregation. The prayer request is first briefly summarized in German. The people sitting in the church stand up and remain in their prayer positions, regardless of whether they understand what is being prayed for or not. The reason this occurs, as explained to me by a congregation member, is that trust has developed between the congregations. Because of the many events they have shared, an overall trust has grown between them. Trust exists not only regarding the mechanics of sharing a church space or in celebrating services together but also through sharing concerns in faith. But what is revealed through the simultaneity of connectedness and delimitation? In the use of different languages and prayer attitudes, differences become apparent. However, the interaction does not remain with the perception of the difference. Instead, in the simultaneity of difference and connectedness, diversity is revealed. Unlike the concept of difference, diversity reveals differences *within* a unit (Cambridge Dictionary: "diversity"). In worship services, this diversity expresses a togetherness based both on an implied community as Christians and knowing one another through everyday encounters. At the same time, the different traditions and communities become visible, and the diversity of Christianity can be expressed – it is a belonging together in diversity. The shared community is based on practices of both demarcation and communization that occur at the same time. In conviviality, it is important to maintain a balance in both directions.

7   Convivial Partnerships – Further Thoughts for the Ecumenical Discourse

Can the convivial aspect of partnerships bring a new perspective to the ecumenical discussion? In the German-speaking context, two models for intercultural theology have been developed: Claudia Hoffmann adapted Homi Bhabha's model of third space for this purpose. This space emerges when different traditions are brought together and negotiate space. It can be described metaphorically as a central staircase that is shaped by all groups living in the house. The respective apartments serve as places of retreat and, in the metaphor, represent individual communities or traditions. Yet, the togetherness in the stairwell, the shared place, has to be negotiated again and again and again. For Hoffmann, the design of the third space involves topics where people can learn from each other (Hoffmann 2021: 127–130). Developing a second model, Gregor Etzelmüller, who has an interest in models of learning, reformulates the ecumenical formula "unity in reconciled diversity" for intercultural ecumenism. For him, the formula expresses that each respective church is recognized in all its strangeness in ways they are being church and in their piety practices. Nevertheless, in his formula "the differences […] are embraced by a greater commonality" (Etzelmüller 2020: 704). Thereby, the possibility arises not only to lament the separation of communities but also to shape the space in between them. For Etzelmüller, the resulting community is a learning community (ibid: 704–707). He thus replaces the original motif of ecumenism as a path of purification and transformation, as defined in Catholic-Protestant ecumenism, with that of a learning community. Learning practices of piety become possible alongside making theological interpretations. By reconciliation, Etzelmüller means recognition, which is the first step in being a learning community.

The results of my data analysis show the importance of the working arrangements of an intermediate or third space. It also shows the necessity of having places of retreat, as described by Hoffmann. Thus, the data reflect important aspects from previous intercultural models. In my opinion, from the results of my analysis, two further aspects should be brought into the ecumenical discussion:

1) Encounters, Acquaintances, and Friendships
The models of Hoffmann and Etzelmüller highlight group relationships between congregations or churches. What is not discussed is the role of relationships between people in the congregations. The previous analysis of the scene between the services shows, however, that unless a community is already assumed or contact has been established between congregations during the common services, building connections beyond the church boundary is often difficult. Thus, another element of intercultural ecumenism is encounters. These encounters are especially focused on people getting to know each other through small talk, in church services, or over a meal. In ecumenical discourse thus far, encounters and interpersonal relationships are often implied, but not theologically interpreted. Silke Radosh-Hinder elaborated on the importance of friendships for interreligious dialogue. In friendships, established social boundaries and structures are not recognized, but instead an alternative reality is created. Therein lies their transformative potential in shaping communities. This is especially true when structural inequalities are present (Radosh-Hinder 2022: 264/289). The role of such friendships should also be

discussed in research on ecumenical dialogue. Besides friendships, a second form of relationship can be elaborated on in this chapter: knowing one another. The value of knowing one another and encountering each other should also be analyzed and brought into the ecumenical discourse.

2) Continuous Recognition and Trust

Ecumenical work is made possible by mutual recognition, as Etzelmüller points out. Unlike ecumenical work that took place in the mid-20th century, mutual recognition does not have to be negotiated dogmatically but occurs in contexts of intercultural ecumenism through participation in partnerships. In sharing the church space, this recognition occurs not only initially, at the founding of these partnerships, but repeatedly and regularly over time. The dismantling of the worship space after each service enables the construction of the next worship space. In giving space to other communities, the legitimacy of the congregation is also recognized, even if it means limiting one's own time in the space. It is also possible to observe that trust developed over time and especially through the realization of joint projects. Trust is not only a reflection of past successes but also gives confidence for pursuing future projects. Thus, trust becomes, in addition to recognition, another stabilizing element within ecumenical partnerships. The role of trust has not yet been introduced into the ecumenical discourse. This should be also discussed in the future.

References

"Conviviality", February 7, 2024 (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/engli
sch/conviviality).

"Diversity", February 7, 2024 (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dive
rsity).

"Internationale Gemeinden", February 7, 2024 (https://internationale-gemeinden.de/w
as-verstehen-wir-unter-einer-internationalen-gemeinde/).

Anderson, Benedict (1991): Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread
of Nationalism (revised and enlarged edition), London: Verso.

Bennett, Julia Margaret (2012): "Doing Belonging: A Sociological Study of Belonging in
Place as the Outcome of Social Practices." A Thesis Submitted to the University of
Manchester, February 7, 2024 (https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/
54528723/FULL_TEXT.PDF).

Bieler, Andrea (2008): Gottesdienst interkulturell: Predigen und Gottesdienst feiern im
Zwischenraum, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Dümling, Bianca (2018): "Migration verändert die kirchliche Landschaft in Deutsch-
land: Entwicklung und Geschichte der Migrationskirchen." In: Claudia Rammelt/
Esther Hornung (eds.), Begegnung in der Glokalität: Christliche Migrationskirchen
in Deutschland im Wandel, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, pp. 77–90.

Etzelmüller, Gregor (2022): "Migrationskirchen als ökumenische Herausforderung für
Theologie und Kirchen in Deutschland." In: Gregor Etzelmüller/Claudia Rammelt

(eds.), Migrationskirchen: Internationalisierung und Pluralisierung des Christentums vor Ort, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, pp. 697–715.

Garfinkel, Harold (1974): "The Origins of the Term Ethnomethodology." In: Roy Turner (ed.), Ethnomethodology, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 10–27.

Geertz, Clifford (⁶1999): "Dichte Beschreibung: Bemerkungen zu einer deutenden Theorie von Kultur." In: Clifford Geertz, Dichte Beschreibung: Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, pp. 7–43.

Gilroy, Paul (2004): After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture? Abdingdon: Routledge.

Heil, Tillmann (2020): Comparing Conviviality: Living with Difference in Casamance and Catalonia, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heil, Tilmann (2015): "Conviviality: (Re-)Negotiating Minimal Consensus." In: Steven Vertovec (ed.), Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies, London: Routledge 317–324.

Hepp, Andreas/Berg, Matthias/Roitsch, Cindy (2014): "Mediatized Worlds of Communitization as Localists, Centrists, Multi-localists and Pluralists." In: Andreas Hepp/Friedrich Krotz (eds.), Mediatized Worlds: Culture and Society in a Media Age, Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 174–203.

Hirschauer, Stefan (2001): "Ethnografisches Schreiben und die Schweigsamkeit des Sozialen: Zu einer Methodologie der Beschreibung." In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 30/6, pp. 429–451.

Hoffmann, Claudia (2021): Migration und Kirche: Interkulturelle Lernfelder und Fallbeispiele aus der Schweiz, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich.

Kalender, Mehmet T. (2023): Räumlichkeit und interreligiöse Begegnung: Wechselwirkungen von religiöser Pluralität, Materialität und Interaktion, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Lamont, Michele/Molnar, Virag (2002): "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." In: Annual Review of Sociology 28, pp. 167–195.

Liturgie Konferenz (2020): Gottesdienst und Migration (ausserdem: Beiträge zum digitalen Abendmahl), Liturgie und Kultur 1/2020.

Löw, Martina (2001): Raumsoziologie, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

Meyer, Esther Maria (2022): "Kommunikation des Evangeliums im dritten Raum: Empirisch-theologische Reflexionen zu interkulturell-ökumenischen Gottesdiensten." In: Theologische Zeitschrift 78/1, pp. 85–103.

Neal, Sarah/Bennett, Katy/Cochrane, Allan/Mohan, Giles (2019): "Community and Conviviality? Informal Social Life in Multicultural Places." In: Sociology 53/1, pp. 69–86.

Nowicka, Magdalena/Vertorec, Steven (2014): "Introduction: Comparing Convivialities. Dreams and Realities of Living-With-Difference." In: European Journal of Cultural Studies 17/4, pp. 341–356.

Pfaff-Czarnecka, Joanna (2011): From "Identity" to "Belonging" in Social Research: Plurality, Social Boundaries, and the Politics of the Self. Working Papers in Development Sociology and Social Anthropology 368, Bielefeld: Universität Bielefeld, pp. 1–18, February 7, 2024 (https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-431029).

Radosh-Hinder, Silke (2022): Konstruierte Gleichheit: Von interreligiöser Kommunikation zu politischer Freundschaft, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Weber, Max (1922): Grundriss der Sozialökonomik. III. Abteilung Wirtschaft und Gesell-
schaft. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, February 7, 2024 (https://archive.org/details/wirtsc
haftundges00webeuoft/page/n5/mode/2up).

Wise, Amanda/Noble, Greg (2016): "Convivialities. An Orientation." In: Journal of Inter-
cultural Studies 37/5, pp. 423–431.