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The Desire to be Known:  
The “Maarten Luther Kerk project”  
in Amsterdam<sup>1</sup>

Building community/communion  
in an unchurched context

*A place of desire – A place for God?*

By choosing the concept of “desire”, the theme of the 2011 International Academy of Practical Theology related rather intriguingly to its conference place, Amsterdam.

In people’s imagination, Amsterdam has always been a city of desires par excellence. On the other hand, it is a city as many in our globalized world, very well comparable to others. There is an extensive nightlife and an intriguing day-life, but there are just as well many different forms of multi faceted neighborhoods. Among these are comparatively calm areas of habitation as well as hotspots of social tension. And there are churches and parishes active in this city, seeking a way to proclaim and practice the Gospel in a way that makes sense to people, even and especially when “being churchy” among people of most social strata in Amsterdam and the urban parts of the Netherlands is generally seen as a thing of the past, which has outlived its relevance.

Much research and reflection is, for good reason, devoted nowadays to how churches deal with (or fail to deal with) the daily reality of uprooted and socially disadvantaged people in societies, and how underprivileged groups

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<sup>1</sup> The main ideas of this article were first presented and discussed at the 2011 conference of IAPT in Amsterdam, July 21–25, 2011. City of Desires – A place for God? Tenth Biannual Conference International Academy of Practical Theology – [www.ia-pt.org](http://www.ia-pt.org).

of people (in western societies especially) are often no longer present at all within parishes, and are not reached by initiatives and mission strategies of churches.<sup>2</sup>

This article will, in the light of IAPT's 2011 theme, take a different perspective and focus on the chances for God to "happen"<sup>3</sup> within the context of an ethnically balanced, rather well-off neighborhood in Amsterdam. It will, based on participatory research<sup>4</sup>, seek to describe ideals, conditions, concepts and developments of a specific mission initiative, the MLK/Maarten Luther Kerk project, in one of the southern neighborhoods of Amsterdam.<sup>5</sup> From there it will try to identify aspects for further discussion and challenges which extend beyond the context of this particular project.

### *Being at home in the city*

A metropolis is many cities! Globalization and the demand for (economic) mobility have greatly accelerated the diversification of the social maps of big cities. The result is that many different neighborhoods have formed, one next to the other, on the basis of differing common factors. Social, ethnic, cultural and economic factors become prevailing aspects in the decisions of people (or factors that cause people) to move somewhere or to stay or to leave a place. The question why and how people who live a life generally characterized as "being rootless, displaced between worlds, living between a lost past

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2 Among many other publications, the EKD-"Denkschrift" – Gerechte Teilhabe. Befähigung zu Eigenverantwortung und Solidarität. Eine Denkschrift des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zur Armut in Deutschland, Gütersloh 2006, states the problem and tries to develop a vision to depart from there.

3 Zahrt, H., *Jesus aus Nazareth. Ein Leben*, Munich 1989, 164. It is interesting to note that this same expression (God happens), used by a conservative German writer like Zahrt, when placed in a different context (a Dutch dispute about whether it is to be understood as "within the boundaries of Protestant confession" for a pastor to express that God does not "exist" but "happens") caused huge waves of public and church commotion. See: Hendrikse, K., *Geloven in een God die niet bestaat. Manifest van een atheïstische dominee*, Amsterdam (Nieuw Amsterdam) 2007 and earlier.

4 Elsewhere this method is referred to as "action research": As researcher and participant, involved in the ongoing development of the project analyzed, shaping its direction while the process unfolds, one has the advantage of gaining first-hand information but risks to lack distance with regard to the outcome.

5 The Maarten Luther Kerk (MLK) project (referred to below as MLK) is carried out on behalf of the Evangelical-Lutheran parish of Amsterdam. See for details of activity and core concepts: [www.luthersamsterdam.nl/maartenlutherkerk](http://www.luthersamsterdam.nl/maartenlutherkerk).

and a fluid present”<sup>6</sup> start “feeling at home” in a certain place, and what they search for in a neighborhood in order to be able to make themselves at home, is widely discussed.<sup>7</sup>

What is often left aside in these discussions, which take place predominantly within the field of social science, is the question how the elements sustaining the concept of “home” may relate to the subject of community/communion, which is so central in theological thought and ecclesial self-understanding.<sup>8</sup>

The present article will take a closer look at that question.

### *“Rivierenbuurt” Amsterdam*

The social map of the area where the pilot-project of MLK is situated shows some significant characteristics.

The area and its architectural structure was part of the famous “Plan Zuid” by Dutch architect H. P. Berlage.<sup>9</sup> The construction period reached its peak between 1917 and 1925, and the area was originally designed to be attractive for middleclass inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

Looking at the historic age-statistics of the neighborhood “Rivierenbuurt” (rivers and water-related phenomena being the name-givers of streets), one can identify a significant turning point about half-way into the first decade of this millennium.<sup>11</sup>

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6 Rapport, N. and Dawson, A., *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, Oxford 1998, 23.

7 Many of the lectures and papers of the “RC21 Conference” of the Sociology for Urban and Regional Development International Sociological Association centered on this question in its 2011 consultation in Amsterdam, titled: *The Struggle to Belong – Dealing with Diversity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Urban Settings*. See: [www.rc21.org](http://www.rc21.org).

8 Interestingly, most of the publications dealing with urban life in the perspective of practical theology (summarized under the label of “urban studies” since the 1980s) don’t specifically focus on this question either. Even among the contributions to the recent “Kirchen-Festschrift” for Wolfgang Grünberg (*Theologie der Stadt – Zusammenleben als Fluch und Geschenk Gottes, Kirche in der Stadt, Band 17*, Berlin 2010) it is touched only in passing by some more lucid contributions.

9 Gaillard, K. e. a. (ed.), *Berlage en Amsterdam Zuid*, Rotterdam 1992.

10 Heeresma, H., *Een jongen uit plan Zuid*, Amsterdam 2007, is a good introduction to how the neighborhood “felt” in the 30s and 40s.

11 See: *Jaarboek Amsterdam in cijfers/kerncijfers – Zuideramstel* ([www.os.amsterdam.nl/pdf/<year>\\_jaarboek...](http://www.os.amsterdam.nl/pdf/<year>_jaarboek...)) In 2003–2004 the decrease of inhabitants of 75+ years of age was 1 %, 2004–2005 it was 2.5 %, 2005–2006 it was 1.6 %, 2006–2007 it was 3.2 %, 2007–2008 it was 2.5 %, 2008–2009 it was 2 %.

The main reason for this breaking moment is that many people originally moved to the area when they started families in the early 40s of the past century.<sup>12</sup> Most of them stayed in the neighborhood for a very long period, because it had proved “a good place to be”, homogenous in age and social strata (medium middleclass), and catering to the wishes of this layer of society for a peaceful and secure living. Thus the average age of inhabitants increased year after year. After 2005 however, many of them had reached old age and started moving either to apartments more suitable to their needs or closer to their children or to senior citizens’ homes.

### *A new group of inhabitants*

The group of people which then moved into the area and now lives in those houses consists generally of a younger generation with well-paid jobs and extensive educational background, often engaged in “artistic” professions.<sup>13</sup> In most cases both partners have a job outside the house, albeit that not both partners work full-time. They have an average of 1.8 children of pre-school and/or the first years of primary education.

As a result of the specific history of secularization and the secondary effects of “depillarization” in the Netherlands<sup>14</sup>, this group of inhabitants is

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12 There is however another story, still to be told in detail elsewhere, about those coming to live in the neighborhood in the 40s of the past century: Many of the houses had been inhabited earlier by Jewish citizens, who were deported and killed in Nazi camps during World War II. Of the 17 000 Jewish inhabitants of the Rivierenbuurt, 13 000 were deported and killed. On the basis of cooperation between “The Digital Jewish Monument” and the “Jewish Museum of History” an Amsterdam daily, “Parool” (22 April 2011), published a list of all houses in Amsterdam from where Jewish inhabitants “disappeared” in the early forties. (See the list on: <http://www.4en5meiamsterdam.nl/attachment/25010>).

13 The “new creative class of society”: writers, art-directors, lawyers, psychologists etc.

14 “Depillarization” or “ontzuiling” (NL) is the process of dissolving or breaking down of the traditional “pillars” of segregation within Dutch society. Society used to be divided into (more than one) Reformed, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, non-religious ... segments (pillars, “zuilen” [NL]), with organizations of their own and in fact with separate lifestyles and social networks. This strict segregation, predominantly along lines of religious tradition, which fortified their “territory” with often strongly oppressive forms of internal moralism, was broken in the 1960s. Among those who had freed themselves of the restrictive “powers” of those institutions, the break resulted in a strongly negative view upon any kind of institutional church tradition. While society has changed radically since then, parallel to a tremendous loss of influence of the churches, this anti-church attitude is in fact inherited by many even two and

predominantly “unchurched”<sup>15</sup>, if not to say they carry prevalingly negative feelings towards “church” in every aspect and form.<sup>16</sup>

Most of them have concluded the period of training for, finding and getting jobs, and they have entered the first “settling period” in their lives. They are searching for a relatively affordable<sup>17</sup> place to do that, and identify the area of “Rivierenbuurt” as such a place. In the informal interviews (casual communication at school entrances, supermarkets, meeting people in the context of activities etc.), which form the informational backbone of this article, many indicate that, when coming to the neighborhood, they had hoped for a kind of life and surrounding neighborhood that would allow them to not only “be housed” somewhere, but to “live here” (integrating life in its many layers with locality and social structure).<sup>18</sup>

### *A shift in the social fabric*

Meanwhile the social fabric of the area is confronted with radical changes in politics and socio-financial structures. Many small scale institutions of social and cultural life, which had been created and sustained by government funds during earlier periods of political development, have been closing down

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three generations later. See for an overview of data and interpretation of the process of “ontzuijing”: Becker, J. W. and Vink, R., *Secularisatie in Nederland 1966–1992. Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, Rijswijk 1994.*

- 15 For in-group specification of forms of churchliness and spirituality see: G. de Jong, *Spiritualiteit van Dertigers en Veertigers*, KASKI reports 604 a and 604 b, Nijmegen 2010. <http://www.ru.nl/kaski/onderzoek/publicaties/2010-0/>.
- 16 This aspect of the social/religious diversity of the age-group between 30 and 40 is not sufficiently monitored or documented in the KASKI reports, but obvious from informal interviews carried out within the project MLK Amsterdam.
- 17 The average family income in this neighborhood is clearly above the standard income in the NL. Since 1996 it has always been more than 111 % of the average Dutch income, and after a significant “high” in 2002–2004 it has kept its level at 114.4 % during several years. From 2010 it is difficult to compare data, because two city regions (South and “Old South”) have been joined organizationally and data are given for both regions in one number. But it is clear from those data, that the average income is still around the same percentage overall in this neighborhood. See: *Jaarboek Amsterdam in cijfers/kerncijfers – Zuideramstel* ([www.os.amsterdam.nl/pdf/<year>\\_jaarboek...](http://www.os.amsterdam.nl/pdf/<year>_jaarboek...)).
- 18 For an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of what is hidden in this expression, i. e. the concept of “home” or “being/feeling at home”, and its social and physical/local aspects, see: Duyvendak, Jan Willem, *The Politics of Home. Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2011.

recently. Neighborhood centers, childcare initiatives, socio-cultural centers etc., which used to be taken for granted in most neighborhoods in Dutch cities, are now disappearing one after the other, as a result of a recent shift to right-wing and neo-liberal economic policies since some political parties of this background came to power in recent elections.

*The changing presence of Church and the MLK project*<sup>19</sup>

Earlier already, and for different reasons, many church buildings in the area had closed down because of shrinking local membership and general lack of resources, and parish life had had to be “shifted” to some focal points elsewhere in the city. Church buildings were sold, re-used for other purposes or torn down to make place for new housing projects etc. All of these solutions were also discussed for the Maarten Luther Kerk, the Lutheran parish and church building in the Rivierenbuurt, which, after having been home to an active community for decades, shared that same decrease in attendance of activities and religious services. For two years the building was practically closed<sup>20</sup> for parish activities, and Sunday services were discontinued, allowing for all kinds of solutions in dealing with the situation.

After those two years of closure and ongoing reflection on parish policy, and taking into account the above mentioned socio-political shift in society, the MLK project was started in 2008 as what one may call a “rebooting process” of the parish. It is designed to first of all explore opportunities for re-establishing communication and encounter<sup>21</sup> with the local, multi-faceted,

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19 For a more general analysis of the factors and effects of secularization and un-churching in the Netherlands, see: G. Dekker, J. de Hart en J. Peters, *God in Nederland 1966–1996*, Amsterdam (Anthos/RKK/KRO) 1997. – H. Knippenberg, *De religieuze kaart van Nederland. Omvang en geografische spreiding van de godsdienstige gezindten vanaf de reformatie tot heden*, Assen (Van Gorcum) 1992. – J. W. Becker en R. Vink, *Secularisatie in Nederland, 1966–1991. De verandering in opvattingen en enige gedragingen*, Den Haag/Rijswijk (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau/VUGA) 1994. – J. W. Becker, J. de Hart en J. Mens, *Secularisatie en alternatieve zingeving in Nederland, Rijswijk/Den Haag (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau/VUGA) 1997*. – J. W. Becker en J. S. J. de Wit, *Secularisatie in de jaren negentig*, Den Haag (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) 2000/3 (<http://www.scp.nl/dsresource?objectid=21320&type=org>).

20 Meanwhile the activities of external groups, which had been renting room in the building for quite some time, continued.

21 Encounter here, and in the main text of the article, though the processes related to are not psychotherapeutic, is to be understood in the existential perspective of the defini-

group of inhabitants. Furthermore it is meant to develop and realize a tentative program of activities and moments of encounter, reflection and contemplation, engaging both parish members and the predominantly unchurched inhabitants alike. Even though the "start through" process has meanwhile been received positively by most, the history of closure has left much emotional pain among "remaining" parish members. Human and financial resources were again allocated to working in the area, starting out with the relatively vague idea of creating a "spiritual center" in the premises of the MLK, as part of the presence of the Lutheran parish in the city.<sup>22</sup> The missionary concept applied was meant to be and still is predominantly receptive and open to what would turn up from first initiatives of encounter between people in the neighborhood.<sup>23</sup>

### *How does it feel ...?*

During a first phase, many informal "interviews" were carried out in the area,<sup>24</sup> talking to the local policemen, the bartenders and guests in the pubs, in shops, on the market, but as well contacting the formal parish members who still lived in the area around the building of the MLK. On the basis of this first orientation, the basic formula for the future MLK project, nucleus for a mis-

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tion of Victor Frankl and others as used in describing "Gestalt" processes. See among other publications: Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, New York, 1997.

22 Initial project period: 5 + years; evaluation of progress after 3 + years.

23 In this radical openness it is to a certain degree related to the missionary concept of "the parish as inn" or "herberg" (NL), as described prominently in the publications of Jan Hendriks, *Gemeente als Herberg* (1999), and *Op weg naar de Herberg* (2002). Hendriks' model is in fact floating on a wider movement of "open church"/"Offene Kirche", popular in the second half of the 1990s in Belgium, England, Germany and the Netherlands. The main difference of the MLK project (and its specific development) from the features of Hendriks' model are caused by the fact that Hendriks in fact presupposes an existing parish that changes perspective from introspection to looking at what significance the parish could have for the society it lives in. In the case of the MLK project, the actual parish was in fact close to nonexistent when the project started. The "input" of the parish was in fact not much more than the openness to the neighborhood itself, the building, creativity and communication.

24 The key concepts/images/quotes that came up in these "incidental" interviews were loosely collected in a database. After some time clear "gravitation centers" around some common concepts became visible. The total of comments, quotes and images collected was more than 400 from 120 contacts identified by initials, sex and age.

sion statement to be developed, was determined to be: “A social, cultural and spiritual center – with church characteristics”.

The common elements recognizable in almost all assessments of and comments on “... How does it feel to live here” were<sup>25</sup>:

- It is still a “good place” to live, but cohesion is slightly deteriorating (“People don’t greet<sup>26</sup> [nor know] each other [any more]<sup>27</sup>”).
- There is no “local”<sup>28</sup> feeling of centeredness, no social “heart”<sup>29</sup> of the area. (“How do I describe to someone where I live? Close to ... – on the way to ... what/where?”<sup>30</sup>)
- The atomization of society starts affecting this part of the city too<sup>31</sup> (“Few people sit or stroll ‘outside’. Much time is spent inside, behind closed doors ...”)<sup>32</sup>
- The architectural structure of buildings, of streets and places, feels pleasant. It communicates a “we” image<sup>33</sup> (which is shared and appreciated) – but where and what and how is that “we” structured and visible in relations between people?<sup>34</sup>

*“The desire to be known”*

Quotes and concepts that appear in the interviews show as well an apparent openness of new and old inhabitants to accept each other in principle as “nice people”<sup>35</sup>, willing to live with each other in this area.

And very obviously as well, this willingness to live together in the area, communicated in different wordings, has a subtext of shared emotional value among both the new and the old inhabitants. Almost all people interviewed

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25 Detectable as cumulative “concepts” in many of the comments.

26 IB, m 33 yrs (in 25 other similar comments).

27 LV, f 72 yrs (in 35 other similar comments).

28 PS, f 26 yrs (in 10 other similar comments).

29 TB, f 74 yrs (in 12 other similar comments).

30 HV, m 76 yrs (in 5 other similar comments).

31 BB, f 78 yrs (in 6 other similar comments).

32 FR, f 48 yrs (in 18 other similar comments).

33 GC, f 35 yrs (in 6 other similar comments).

34 BB, f 43 yrs (in 5 other similar comments). Castells calls this the evaporation of social meaning from places, which then results in a diluted and diffused logic of space (Castells, M., *The Informational City*, Oxford 1989, 348).

35 This terminology is present in almost all comments.

shared, in one way or another, a "desire to be known"<sup>36</sup>. This was communicated in different images but accumulated in the very basic image (and wish or desire) of being recognized when walking the streets of the neighborhood.

Among the original (older) inhabitants, this desire to be known had an obviously nostalgic touch ("a bit like it used to be ..."<sup>37</sup>), with strong notes relating to "feeling safe"<sup>38</sup> and "being noted"<sup>39</sup>, as in: people taking note of each others' existence, and watching over each other.

Among the new inhabitants there is an apparent wish to consciously and actively root oneself in the local context and to establish a holistic physical and social center to one's life, broader than and different from the actual house one lives in.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly the imagery used to describe this seems to be stemming from emotional images related more to village structures than to city contexts. This is the case even when the actual history of the people using these images does not include having lived in rural contexts.

Feeling "like in a small village"<sup>41</sup>, where "people know and support each other when needed"<sup>42</sup> and "do things together"<sup>43</sup>, are typical ways of describing the wished-for situation of living.

This "desire" creates an openness of the group of new inhabitants to local initiatives of cultural, artistic and/or relationship-building activities, while the "old" inhabitants appreciate (or tolerate) almost any kind of activity which brings people in the neighborhood together at one place as "a bit like what we had in the old days"<sup>44</sup>.

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36 The terminology "desire" as such never came up in the interviews which were mostly conducted in Dutch. It was chosen for this article in order to relate more directly to the theme of the IAPT conference where the data were first presented. Actual concepts used were "need" (behoefte), "wish" (wens), "hope" (hoop), "dream" (droom), "longing" (verlangen), "memory" (herinnering) etc. Still the actual concepts cover the emotional width of "desire" in such a way that it seems correct to sum them up under this terminology.

37 JM, m 73 yrs (in 22 other similar comments).

38 TB, f 74 yrs (in 18 other similar comments).

39 HJ, m 95 yrs (in 15 other similar comments).

40 "While homes may be located, it is not the location that is 'home'." (Easthope, Hazel, A place called home. *Housing, Theory and Society*, vol. 21/3, Cardiff 2004, 136).

41 SN, f 26 yrs (in 3 other similar comments).

42 SB, m 30 yrs (in 4 other similar comments).

43 MD, f 31 yrs (in 5 other similar comments).

44 A nostalgic phrase, which is found in almost all comments of this group.

*Finetuning the MLK project*

The MLK project, after an initial six-month survey period of data collecting and exploration, started out with an explicitly personal approach,<sup>45</sup> based upon the presupposition that this would tap the emotional layer of the above-mentioned “desire”, and it would be easier for people to accept this approach instead of an institutional one (as “MLK parish”). It would help counteract negative attitudes towards church and critical perceptions of institutions in general.<sup>46</sup>

All the inhabitants were invited (through letterbox mail/flyer) to brainstorm together about “What would be the kind of activities that could and should be organized in the MLK premises, which would be appreciated by inhabitants of the area?”

Three meetings were arranged, organized at different timeslots during the week, in order to cater to differing schedules. They brought together the astonishing number of more than 150 people, of which many were first-timers to enter a (or this) church building. The meetings themselves turned into unexpected “cohesion experiences”, and the ideas brought forward helped describe a broad field of possibly relevant activities.

These were then clustered in six categories, for which activities were set up. Some volunteers were found to help start one or more of them, others were initiated proactively by the project coordinator (pastor), hoping for an activating effect of the initiative itself.

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45 A flyer was distributed widely in the neighborhood, designed as a personal letter with hand-written signature, including a picture of the main agent on behalf of the MLK project (the Lutheran pastor). The letter invited all inhabitants to participate in collecting ideas and wishes for activities to be deployed in and around the MLK building. Some examples were given to outline the potential scope of programming (from yoga to Sunday services, from arts-lectures to concerts and performances, from social meetings to being a platform for initiatives coming forward from within the area). The picture of the main agent of the project added on the layout of the letter increased the “personal” image of the project and made it possible for inhabitants to actively approach the person in the street (at supermarkets ...) with their comments. By doing so, “the project” was walking the streets of the neighborhood, whenever the person was present. A typical response to the invitation would be: “I have received this letter from you. What a good initiative! I may not come to the proposed meeting, but I appreciate that something is being done ...”

46 In general, this underlines the “iconic” role and significance of the representative of any organization or community, in this case the role of the pastor in the communication of the parish. People relate to people predominantly, not to organizations.

The activities covered the categories of:

Encounter (ontmoeting)

Information and exchange of views

Expression

Music and movement

Children’s activities

Spirituality, contemplation and worship

In order to specifically cater to the group of newcomers, who, by educational background and personal interest are predominantly part of the “new creative class of society”, the programming focused on art from the avant-garde rather than conventional perspective. It sought to combine esthetics and spirituality, and shaped moments of human encounter in the perspective of intergenerational communication. This resulted in different series of “cutting edge” performances and “special moments”, which did indeed attract people from the primary target group of newcomers in the neighborhood (and from further away). But at the same time the activities were “accepted” by the group of long-time inhabitants as “something new; I would normally not have taken the initiative to go and participate. But as it is taking place in the MLK building around the corner, I came anyhow ...”<sup>47</sup>.

*Diaconal aspects of “being known and noticed” –  
The “Cup-of-tea-plus” project*

While the Lutheran parish council had decided to initiate a general “rebooting process” in the Rivierenbuurt neighborhood, resulting in the calling of a pastor to work there, the diaconal arm of the parish – the board of Lutheran Diaconia Amsterdam – was discussing widely the different dimensions of the concept of sustainability in their manifold support projects. In these discussions the board identified as a concern of their diaconal work, among other aspects, the sustainability of the very parish structure and communal fabric of the Lutheran parish of Amsterdam. “No ‘diaconia’ without the practical experience of a community of people of faith, they argued, and no ‘church/parish’ without its (diaconal) arms attending to those in need ...” If, for various reasons mentioned above, the very fabric of the parish in the neighborhood of the Rivierenbuurt, its social cohesion and pastoral dimensions, were endangered, this was a task for diaconal work too. In response, a

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47 LV, f 72 yrs.

project was designed, called “Cup-of-tea-‘plus’”,<sup>48</sup> which started in the fall of 2008. A part-time diaconal worker was deployed in the Rivierenbuurt in order to literally visit and accompany people<sup>49</sup> and at the same time engage in the initiatives of the MLK project in general. This “double visibility” of church – as initiator of cultural and spiritual cohesion activities and as accompanier in situations of social isolation or bureaucratic and emotional deadlocks<sup>50</sup> – became gradually known as “the face of the MLK”. The social/diaconal aspect of this face developed, for many, into an additional factor of credibility for the parish and the project of MLK in general. Within the different groups of people who would attend MLK activities, a network of mutual pastoral care was gradually formed, accompanied professionally by the diaconal worker and the pastor likewise, but in different dimensions. “Being known”, in relation to the MLK project, started to become “being cared for/accompanied in times of trouble”. This tangible aspect of the MLK project added an important and indispensable feature to the community developing. At the same time it helped reestablishing, to a certain degree, acknowledgment of the church as a tangible and positive factor in many senses within the fabric of society and life in this area.

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48 The Dutch name for this project is “Kopje thee plus”. The “cup of tea” refers to the situation of visiting people at their homes, casually (drinking a cup of tea together), while the “plus” refers to the aim of the project, which is: on behalf of Lutheran Diaconia extending care and accompaniment to people, irrespective of their church or denominational background, in order to motivate and empower them to initiating joint projects with others in the neighborhood and work on more social cohesion in the neighborhood. See the project description at: [http://www.diaconie.com/watwijdoen/Kopje\\_Thee\\_Plus.html](http://www.diaconie.com/watwijdoen/Kopje_Thee_Plus.html) and <http://www.kerkinactie.nl/projecten/Bezoek-aan-mensen-in-kwetsbare-situaties-in-Amsterdam--p716-7796>.

49 The first group of people visited were those formally registered in the parish membership and pastoral files, who for various reasons (age, grudge about the period of closure, social or physical issues ...) were not “visible” in parish activities any more. In the long run, other groups (outside parish membership) were added, often as a result of contacts established through MLK cohesion work in general.

50 The very initiative of visiting people, breaking the social isolation, sharing presence and offering attention for the life-stories of people, often resulted in being asked to assist in complicated bureaucratic processes: How to get the government welfare system to work, how to apply for certain grants or services ... – or in personal conflicts/crises.

*Intergenerational encounter and “crossing over”*

Intergenerational encounter has meanwhile become part of almost every event, and it has turned out to be a new and often surprising experience for performing artists as well, to meet people (from the group of old-time inhabitants) whom they would normally not expect to show up at their performances.

Within three years after the initial start of the project the group of people engaged in one or another of the activities in the MLK has multiplied by a factor of ten,<sup>51</sup> and some of the ones who were initially reluctant to attend anything church-related start “crossing over” and become willing to engage in these cohesion processes. For some this may even include, in the long run, re-examining the option to be in one way or another related to an institution, a spiritual tradition or even a church – when and if it presents itself as facilitator for encounter on all these levels of local life, including that of faith. The project or missional initiative MLK, meant to create this kind of space for encounter based on “what touches the heart and lifts us up above the day-to-day perspective”<sup>52</sup>, has meanwhile become a breeding place for new forms of social and spiritual communal life, and consequently for new forms of “Church”.

Cross-over from one activity to another is increasingly taking place. People who have experienced one event in a positive way “try out” another event, including sometimes giving the more or less traditional Sunday worship a try, which is taking place within the very premises they visited earlier for a concert, a performance, a lecture or a discussion event.

*Confessional and religious diversity within the worshipping communion*

As the MLK project in general attracts people regardless of their confessional or religious background, so do the different forms of worship and moments of contemplation and prayer. A Sunday (afternoon!) service is, for the

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51 Before the project started in 2008, there were about 35 people engaged in two group activities, who had continued to meet in the MLK building. Today (2011) the total number of people who, in different frequencies, take part in activities is close to 400.

52 It is with this standard sentence that every activity is opened by either the pastor him-/herself or someone acting on behalf of the parish community in a broader sense.

time being, offered once a month.<sup>53</sup> Those who seek a more frequent worship life can find other (Lutheran and non-Lutheran) churches easily accessible elsewhere in Amsterdam. Those who participate in the worship of the MLK community come from different traditional backgrounds. About one third of them are Lutherans, another thirty percent still belong to or have their roots in other Christian traditions (Dutch or French Reformed, Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Mennonite etc.). Among the remaining thirty percent, some have some kind of affiliation with non-Christian traditions (Sufi, Buddhist etc.) or report to have no conscious religious roots at all.<sup>54</sup> The liturgy for these moments of worship is based on classical Lutheran tradition, allowing for changes and variations. Its being identifiable as “classical” seems, for the time being, to be creating a common entry-point for traditional church members<sup>55</sup> and newcomers or unchurched people alike. For those who are not used to attending Christian worship services, the “strangeness” of the form seems to be acceptable as fitting the “strange” situation of finding oneself in a worshipping context. The catholicity of the liturgy opens windows of recognition for those with a traditional background elsewhere in the ecumenical spectrum.

The weekly moments of contemplation and prayer, called “Zomaar Stille in de week”<sup>56</sup> are frequented by a much smaller group of people, but reflect the same diversity of spiritual or religious backgrounds. Other (incidental) moments of meditation and contemplation<sup>57</sup> attract “free religious seekers” predominantly, but just as well traditional Christians. In every case, participants in worship are as well participating in one or more of the other activities of MLK.

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53 These services are scheduled in the afternoon, to cater explicitly to the wishes of the older ones who do not want it to be held too early, and the younger ones who want to sleep in, but need their children in bed by six in order to be awake for school on Monday. There are no services during the summer holidays, and right after the generally worship-loaden periods of Christmas and Easter.

54 In the Lutheran city-center parish of the Oude Lutherse Kerk (Old Lutheran Church), which features more “churchy” elements generally and which didn’t have to cope with in-between closure and restart, the group of people attending worship services shows more or less the same composition, with a slightly smaller group of unchurched newcomers.

55 The Lutheran tradition as such is a small one within the context of the Netherlands, where Reformed or Roman Catholic rites have been the dominant features of Church.

56 “A silent moment in the week”.

57 For example a “7to7 peace-meditation on World Peace Day”, or a meditation initiative related to “World Peace Prayer”.

*Is this Church? Some ecclesiological reflections about the MLK project*

The theological reflection which accompanied the MLK project from the beginning has traveled along some of the common doctrinal places of definition, in order to describe what in fact happens in the ongoing process of building communion.<sup>58</sup>

Considering

- that Church is (happens) where people are gathered by the Word of God in Jesus Christ (ecclesia as creatura verbi)
- and that Church therefore by nature is an ongoing process (semper reformanda)
- and that the Church-gathering Word of God, except in its revelation in Jesus Christ, has no once-and-for-all form or sound or wording, then in time it can take on and make use of many different forms: music, prayer, preaching, lecture, silence, dance, ritual, bread and wine, spiritual searching, diaconal accompaniment and the public and practical taking of social and political positions.

Considering

- that those gathering as Church (i. e. being gathered by the Word in one form or another) are always people spiritually “on the move”, with different perspectives of faith and in different places on their personal life-pilgrimage, and with various “closenesses” or “distances” to proclaimed faith (perhaps to be understood as a specific form of the corpus permixtum paradigm), then spiritual diversity is correctly understood as signum ecclesiae, and formal confessional homogeneity is much more a proleptic than a factual feature of Church and its physical manifestation as parish.

Considering

- that theologically the proclamation of the Word in Jesus Christ in preaching and worship is central to the MLK as an integral part of the Evangelical-Lutheran parish of Amsterdam, some people within the multi-faceted ongoing process of forming communion do gather explicitly in forms of worship to celebrate the mystery of God’s presence and justification by grace in Jesus Christ. By doing so “their hearts are touched and they are lifted up from the horizontal perspective of life”,

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58 For the aspect of an inclusive understanding of church as a process, see: Wöhle, Andreas, *Auftrag und Aufgabe der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, in: *Lutherische Kirche in der Welt, Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes*, 55/2008, 212 f.

this centeredness around the proclamation and celebration of the Word in the form of worship services does not disqualify other activities that circle around this center “at a certain distance” or in a different shape (= performances, concerts, get-togethers, discussions, diaconal accompaniment ...) as not being part of the process in general. It is evident that in these other activities, – “satellite activities” from the perspective of a conventional theological definition of the religious community –, people are just as well “gathered around that, which touches the heart and lifts up from horizontal perspectives of life”, be it in visual arts, music, performance, meditation ...<sup>59</sup>

The MLK project thus creates opportunities for personal encounter and transcendent experiences and being part of a worshipping community on various levels, with the intentional opportunity for cross-overs.

The project aims, in the long run, at a common understanding of this communion, a common “we”, shared by most of the participants. This common “we” would include the idea that all parts (events, moments) of the project belong together in one way or another. And even though some parts (for example the specific forms of worship) may for the time being not be “to my taste – now”, these elements obviously cater to tastes of others, who are in their way and fashion participants and “owners” of this project and of the same community/communion coming into being.<sup>60</sup>

As a general assumption underlying the MLK project, the following thesis may be formulated:

Saying “Yes” (or AMEN) to being part of the community-creating process (project) of MLK as a whole, in the above mentioned way of accepting all elements as belonging together, is a commitment to an ongoing process, theologically to be understood as an ecclesial one. Those who do so become in theological sense part of a “church/parish in the process of evolving”, whether they themselves define it in these words, or not. When, how and if a specific “confessing” moment ever follows from this being part of the process, is hidden in the process as such and is to be understood as an activity of the Holy Spirit. It is thus no object for theological speculation.

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59 For an in-depth discussion of the relation of theology and art, see for example: Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts. Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric*, New York 2000.

60 Elements of this vision could, in future stages of the process, become part of the MLK project’s mission statement.

*The MLK project – Four “open end” aspects of a practical theological “work in progress”*

I “The desire to be known” or “feel at home” – A strategic docking station for missionary initiatives aiming at experiencing communion

The different ways of how people in the described context formulate their “desire to be known” (or “feel at home”) call for sound theological reflection on the concept of “home” and “belonging” in relation to the ecclesiological “locus” of “communio”. Communicating aspects of this doctrinal concept in the language and (emotional) imagery of “home” and “belonging”, may on the one hand result in an improved understanding and acceptance of Church in general and of missionary activities specifically. On the other hand it may critically sharpen and deepen the ecclesiological concepts as such.

II Redefining the parochial paradigm<sup>61</sup>

The traditional definitions of Church/parish and their formal empirical boundaries (in western contexts) generally refer to people registered as “confessing or baptized members”. However, in urban contexts like the MLK project in Amsterdam and a related project in downtown Amsterdam<sup>62</sup>, we find groups of people who positively and in the broadest sense of the word need to be understood as people called and gathered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to share life and faith, as people who would gather for church services and/or other activities – but of which many would formally not belong to the specific denomination gathering there and then, while others would formally not belong to any church at all, or would even belong to or have strong relations with other faith traditions.

This phenomenon calls for theological interpretation and reflection of the traditional parochial (and ecclesial) paradigms. It might, in this respect, be productive to re-examine the historical ecclesial phenomenon of the groups of “the God-fearing” (φοβούμενοι τον θεον)<sup>63</sup> of the first century of the Christian tradition and the Church. How was their status defined and reflected upon in relation to the Jewish and the Christian community? Did the early church develop aspects of ecclesial concept and insights which could be helpful to understand and discuss (and incorporate) better what is happening today in communities like the ones described in this research? How to move

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61 See for earlier reflections in this regard: Wöhle, Andreas, op. cit. (Jahrbuch), 217 f.

62 The Oude Lutherse Kerk/Old Lutheran Church, the main city center church of the Lutheran parish of Amsterdam.

63 Acts 13,16.26.

to a new definition of Church/parish reflects the ongoing process of Church unfolding?

### III Personalized “iconic” communication versus structural/organizational initiative

In highly developed western countries and especially in their cities, people perceive organizational structures and institutions as more or less anonymous and intransparent actors within the fabric of society. When it comes to relating to their activities and/or invitations to engage in what is offered or brokered by them (products like: courses, moments of learning and encounter, culture, ...), the general attitude of people is the attitude of “customer”, characterized among other elements by a critical distance between person and “product” and by an intrinsic mistrust with regard to the motivation and hidden agenda of the institution. In the Netherlands, this reality is, for historical reasons, even more pronounced with regard to the Church as institution. In an increasingly “iconized” world<sup>64</sup> people relate more easily to persons (represented by faces, “icons”) than to organizations and organizational language. The role of the active representative of the (Church) community (in casu: the pastor) needs to be evaluated and structured in accordance with this type of perception. This implies focusing on personal (and spiritual) integrity as well as communication skills and awareness of “the public space as stage”, where Church is represented by this person. We need to ask the question of how that influences the (academic and church-organized) formation of theologians/pastors, and how it is monitored, reflected upon and accompanied in the actual presentation of church initiatives (including missionary ones) in society.

### IV The Word of God and the many languages of the Arts

Within the same communities described above, one of the main entry-points for re-encounter (or first contact) with Church as institution and faith in practice is provided by art performances (in church buildings). An esthetic

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64 People in the age of “Windows” are increasingly conditioned by computerized learning and tend to relate to all kinds of subjects and concepts of the world (including interpersonal relations) more easily through identifiable pictograms or icons than through descriptive text. Wolfgang Donsbach asks in this regard, whether “the increasing iconization of our worldview through television and the Internet transform our perceptual apparatus and finally our worldview”. (Donsbach, Wolfgang, *The identity of communication research*. Journal of Communication 56, 2006, 438). <http://www.um.es/tic/Documentos/lecturas%20FCI-1/FCI-1%20Tema%202%20texto%201.pdf>.

understanding of arts as “the open work” (opera aperta/Umberto Eco)<sup>65</sup> and a theological understanding of the Gospel as the process of “The Word/Christ unfolding” (i. e. a process open for personal faith experiences and stories) suggest a strong correlation, based on which one may argue that mission initiatives in these contexts would be well advised to seek constructive cooperation between church and arts. Questions to be asked in the structuring of these initiatives would be: How do we define theologically the relationship between church (faith) and arts/experiencing arts? Can paradigms as developed by Adorno<sup>66</sup>, Eco and others<sup>67</sup> sufficiently inform theological reflection on this subject? Which new paradigms are being or need to be developed in this field?

### *Concluding remarks*

The MLK project, using the latent “desire to be known”, present among churchly as well as unchurched people in a highly urbanised city center neighborhood, in order to re-establish parochial community in a broad sense of the word, produces questions to be dealt with in the context of the ecclesiological paradigms of Christian tradition and their translation into the de facto structure of the visible Church. The strong role of the individual person as communicator and the language of arts in communicating transcendent concepts of communion and faith in an unchurched context point to the need for a thorough re-evaluation of the relationship between Church and the Arts.

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65 Umberto Eco, *The open work* (transl. from the Italian/*Opera aperta*), Harvard University Press 1989.

66 See among other publications: Adorno, Theodor, *Ästhetische Theorie. Gesammelte Studien* 7, Frankfurt 1970.

67 Some other concepts are developed by Richard Viladesau in his different publications (for example: *Theological Aesthetics – God in Imagination, Beauty and Art*) and more recently by Jeremy Begby (Duke Div. School) in his publications on theology and music.

## Deutsche Zusammenfassung

*„Die Sehnsucht er(ge)kannt zu werden“*

Der Artikel beschreibt exemplarisch den Kontext, die Geschichte und einige praktisch-theologische beziehungsweise missionstheologische Hauptaspekte und Erfahrungen des Projektes „Maarten Luther Kerk“ (im Folgenden: MLK) in der südlichen Innenstadt von Amsterdam (Niederlande). In Anlehnung an das Thema der „International Academy of Practical Theology“, die sich in ihrer Jahreskonferenz 2011 mit der Fragestellung des Kirche-Seins in einer „Stadt der Sehnsüchte“ (Amsterdam) beschäftigte, benennt der Artikel die Bedeutung der unterschwellig auch im großstädtischen Milieu anwesenden Sehnsüchte nach Aspekten von beinahe dörflich zu nennenden Sozialstrukturen als Anknüpfungsmöglichkeit für Gemeindeaufbauarbeit und missionstheologische Strategien im weitesten Sinne des Wortes. Zum Ende formuliert der Artikel aus den Erfahrungen des Projektes MLK heraus Anfragen an unter anderem die klassischen Formen des Paradigmas „Gemeinde“, an die Bedeutung der „Person“ (unter der Perspektive der Authentizität) in der Praxis der Kommunikation von Gemeindeaufbauarbeit sowie an das Verhältnis von Kunst und Glaubenssprache.

Im Einzelnen argumentiert der Artikel wie folgt:

### *Ein Ort der Sehnsucht – Ein Ort für Gott?*

Viele praktisch-theologische Untersuchungen setzen sich mit der Frage auseinander, wie Kirchen auf die Tatsache reagieren, dass in westlichen Gesellschaften die soziale Gruppe der Unterprivilegierten in der Kirchenmitgliedschaft de facto durchgängig abwesend ist und dass missionstheologisch begründete Initiativen diese Gruppe nicht erreichen. Der Artikel konzentriert sich demgegenüber auf die Frage, wie es in einem eher „reichen“ und ethnisch-kulturell homogenen Stadtviertel in einer säkularisierten Stadt wie Amsterdam dazu kommen kann, dass „sich Gott ereignet“. Dabei stützt sich der Artikel auf Ergebnisse einer partizipatorischen Untersuchung des missionstheologisch reflektierten Gemeindeaufbauprojekts MLK im Süden Amsterdams.

*Zu Hause sein in der Großstadt*

Im Zeitalter der Globalisierung hat sich auch das Wohnen in den Städten verändert. Selbst gewählte oder von der Arbeits- (oder Arbeitslosigkeits-) Situation erzwungene Mobilität ist zur kennzeichnenden Lebenserfahrung vieler geworden. Die meist im soziologischen Kontext diskutierte Folge ist eine latente soziale Entwurzelung und an sie gekoppelt das Bedürfnis, sich am zentralen Wohnort „zu Hause“ fühlen zu wollen. In diesem Zusammenhang soll die Frage diskutiert werden, wie dieses Paradigma der Sehnsucht nach einem „Zuhause“ im Licht der theologischen Konzepte Gemeinschaft/Gemeinde/communio zu beschreiben wäre.

*„Rivierenbuurt“ Amsterdam*

Das „Rivierenbuurt“-Stadtviertel in Amsterdam, in dem das Pilotprojekt MLK realisiert wird, wurde von dem bekannten niederländischen Architekten H. P. Berlage in den frühen zwanziger Jahren des vorigen Jahrhunderts als Wohnviertel für eine gesellschaftliche Mittelklasse entworfen. Seit den vierziger Jahren, der Periode des Erst- bzw. des geschichtsbedingten Zweitbezuges (nach Deportation und Ermordung des Großteils der ursprünglich jüdischen Bevölkerung) der Wohnungen im Stadtteil, bis hinein in die letzten Jahre des vorigen Jahrhunderts ist die Bewohnerschaft des Viertels relativ unverändert geblieben. Bewohner wohnten im Viertel bis zu dem mit dem Seniorenalter häufig zusammenfallenden Umzug in Seniorenwohnstätten. Seit ungefähr 2005 ändert sich entsprechend die soziale Statistik des Stadtteils.

*Eine neue Gruppe Bewohner*

In die seither freiwerdenden Wohnungen ziehen relativ junge, gut ausgebildete Doppelverdiener aus freischaffenden Berufen (Anwälte, Film- und Theaterschaffende, Literaten ...) meist mit kleinen Kindern. Diese Gruppe der „neuen Kreativen“ ist in den Niederlanden durchgängig kirchenfeindlich eingestellt bzw. vollständig kirchenfern sozialisiert. Sie erfährt und interpretiert diese Einstellung als Befreiung gegenüber einer zumeist als unterdrückend erfahrenen Kirchlichkeit des vorigen Jahrhunderts, auch dort, wo dies nicht auf eigenen Erfahrungen beruht, sondern tradierte Befindlichkeit ausdrückt. Diese Bewohner verbinden, von einem tendenziell ganzheitlichen

Lebenskonzept her, mit ihrem Umzug in den Stadtteil die Hoffnung, hier nicht nur „wohnen“, sondern auch „leben“ zu können, d. h., ihr Leben existentiell mit dem (sozialen) Ort verbinden zu können.

### *Veränderung der sozialen Struktur*

Inzwischen hat sich aber auch im gesamtgesellschaftlichen Rahmen einiges in den Niederlanden geändert. Neoliberale Politik hat zum Kahlschlag der gesellschaftlichen Landschaft von Kunst-, Kultur- und Gemeinschaftssubventionen geführt, mit der Folge dass das Netz der daran hängenden Sozialstrukturen (Bürgerhäuser etc.) größtenteils zusammengebrochen ist.

### *Die sich ändernde Präsenz von Kirche und das MLK-Projekt*

Der säkularisationsbedingte Schrumpfungsprozess der Kirchengemeinden hat, parallel zum vorgenannten Sozialkahlschlag, zugleich zu einem starken Auszug der Kirchengemeinden aus dem Stadtteil geführt (Kirchenschließungen, „Konzentrationsprozess“ ...). Auch für die Martin-Luther-Kirche war zunächst vollständige Schließung und Abriss, Umnutzung oder Verkauf diskutiert worden. Das Gebäude ist in diesem Zusammenhang tatsächlich auch zwei ganze Jahre lang nicht mehr für Gottesdienste der lutherischen Gemeinde genutzt worden. Schließlich entschied sich die lutherische Kirchengemeinde aber zu einem „Durchstart“ mit einem weit formulierten Programm und der Vision, in dem Gebäude ein „Zentrum für Spiritualität“ entstehen zu lassen. Ein Pfarrer/Theologe wurde in Teilzeit auf die Projektstelle berufen.

### *Welches Gefühl ist das ...?*

Zunächst wurden Felduntersuchungen und Interviews mit Sozialakteuren, Ortspolizisten, Gastwirten, Kneipenbesuchern ..., aber auch mit den noch verbliebenen Gemeindegliedern geführt. Dies resultierte in einer Korrektur der Zielstellung des Projekts MLK. Es sollte sich nun auf das Entstehen eines „sozialen, kulturellen und spirituellen Zentrums – mit Kirchencharakter“ richten. In den Interviews kamen immer wieder charakteristische Paradigmen zum Vorschein: die Sehnsucht danach, auf der Straße begrüßt und erkannt zu werden, das Fehlen eines gefühlten Zentrums/Herzens im Stadtteil sowie die

Undeutlichkeit in der Frage, wie das gemeinschaftliche „wir“ der Bewohner eigentlich auszudrücken wäre ...

### *Die Sehnsucht er(ge)kannt zu werden*

In den verschiedenartigen Bildern, die das beschrieben, was die Interviewten im Stadtteil vermissten, gab es eine Konstante, die sich mit dem Thema „Die Sehnsucht er(ge)kannt zu werden“ beschreiben lässt.

### *MLK-Projektzuspitzung*

Nach der informellen Interview- und Orientierungsphase folgte eine Phase der Aktivierung der Stadtteilbewohner, die an die identifizierten Motive der Sehnsucht anknüpfte. In der Kommunikation mit den Bewohnern des Stadtteils wurde in Briefform und Fotobeilagen bewusst die Person und das für Engagement anderer offenstehende Interesse des ausführenden Projektträgers (des Pfarrers) profiliert, um so, auf der Ebene des Persönlichen, die Negativeinstellung gegenüber der Kirche als Institution überbrücken zu helfen. Die Offenheit des Projektes für sehr verschiedene Formen von Kohäsionsaktivitäten wurde herausgestrichen. Persönliche (Haus an Haus) Einladungsbriefe an alle Bewohner brachten unter diesem Nenner mehr als 150 Personen zu „Phantasiemomenten“ zusammen, in denen darüber nachgedacht werden konnte, welche Art von Aktivitäten sich die Bewohner in und ausgehend von der MLK wünschten und bei welcher Art Aktivität sie sich vorstellen könnten, sich selbst zu engagieren. Daraus ergaben sich sechs Sorten von gewünschten Aktivitäten (Begegnung, Information und Austausch, Aktion und „Performance“, Musik und Bewegung, Kinderaktivitäten, Spiritualität – Kontemplation – Gottesdienst).

Um auch und spezifisch den Interessen der Gruppe der „neuen Kreativen“ zu entsprechen, wurden in der Folge Aktivitäten gestartet, die tendenziell eher „Avantgarde“-Charakter haben und Kombinationen suchen zwischen Ästhetik, Spiritualität, Momenten von Begegnung und intergenerationelle Kommunikation. Diese Gruppe der neuen Kreativen wurde tatsächlich erreicht, und auch die bestehende Restgruppe nahm die Aktivitäten unter der Perspektive an: „Ich wäre normalerweise nicht zu ‚so etwas‘ hingegangen. Aber da es in der Martin-Luther-Kirche stattfindet, komme ich ...“

*Diakonische Aspekte des „Er(Ge)kannt-und-bemerkt-Werdens“ –  
Das „Tasse-Tee-plus“-Projekt*

Zur gleichen Zeit, in der die lutherische Kirchengemeinde einen Durchstart im Stadtteil Rivierenbuurt beschloss, diskutierte man in der lutherischen Diakonie der Kirchengemeinde über die Frage der Nachhaltigkeit in der eigenen Projektarbeit. Dabei wurde formuliert, dass es neben der qualitativen Nachhaltigkeit in der Projektarbeit der Diakonie nach „außen“ auch eine Verantwortung für die Nachhaltigkeit der Gemeindestrukturen selber geben müsse. Wenn diese die Diakonie inhaltlich wie personell (und historisch-finanziell) tragende Struktur in Gefahr gerät (wie im Fall des auf die Martin-Luther-Kirche bezogenen Teils der Gemeinde), gerät auch der diakonische Auftrag in Gefahr. So wurde das Projekt „Tasse-Tee-plus“ ins Leben gerufen. Im Auftrag dieses Projektes besuchte eine diakonische Mitarbeiterin Menschen im Stadtteil Rivierenbuurt und begleitete sie in Lebensfragen – auch in solchen der „Lebensorganisation“ (des Umgangs mit Behörden etc.). Zudem engagierte sich diese Mitarbeiterin bei den spezifischen MLK-Aktivitäten. Der Kreis der Besuchten erweiterte sich, über die Kontakte, die bei MLK-Aktivitäten geknüpft wurden, schnell auch auf solche Personen, die nicht im formellen Adressenbestand der lutherischen Ortsgemeinde vorkamen. Es entwickelte sich eine zweifache Sichtbarkeit von Kirche im Leben des Stadtteils: Kirche als Organisator von Begegnungs- und anderen Aktivitäten und Kirche als Begleiterin in (schwierigen) praktischen Lebensfragen. So erhielt der Aspekt des „Er(Ge)kannt-Werdens“ im MLK-Kontext auch den Charakter des „Mit-(praktischer)-Fürsorge-umgeben-Werdens“. In der Wahrnehmung vieler eher kirchenkritisch eingestellter Bewohner erhöhte dies, neben der partizipatorischen Grundeinstellung der Arbeit der MLK als ganzer, noch einmal die Glaubwürdigkeit der kirchlichen Präsenz.

*Intergenerationelle Begegnung*

In beinahe allen Aktivitäten spielt die intergenerationelle Begegnung eine wichtige und häufig inhaltlich überraschende Rolle sowohl für „Besucher“ wie für „Ausführende“ (Künstler etc.). De facto hat sich die Gruppe der von MLK-Aktivitäten erreichten Personen im Laufe der ersten drei Jahre der Arbeit mit diesem Konzept verzehnfacht. Zudem hat es viel „Kreuzbestäubung“ gegeben, wobei Personen nach Teilnahme an einer spezifischen Aktivität auch zu einer anderen Aktivität hinzugekommen sind und häufig von der Rolle des interessierten Besuchers in die des Freiwilligen (Mitarbeiters) hin-

eingewachsen sind. Für den einen oder die andere mag dies auf Dauer sogar bedeuten, dass die Option, sich auch mit der spirituellen und im klassischen Sinne „kirchlichen“ Rolle der Organisation Kirche näher identifizieren zu können und zu wollen, aktuell wird. So hat sich das Projekt MLK – in dessen Zentrum das bei allen Aktivitäten formulierte Anliegen steht, „Menschen zusammenzuführen rund um das, was uns im Herzen anrührt und uns über die Perspektiven des Alltäglichen hinaus trägt“ – zu einem Brutplatz verschiedenartiger neuer Formen sozialen und spirituellen Gemeinschaftslebens entwickelt und damit, so die These des Artikels, zu einem Brutplatz neuer Formen von „Kirche“.

### *Konfessionelle und religiöse Vielfalt innerhalb der Gottesdienstgemeinde*

Das Projekt MLK zielt auf Personen ungeachtet deren konfessionellen oder religiösen Hintergründe. Und so (als Teil der genannten „Kreuzbestäubung“) finden sich auch unter den gelegentlichen oder regelmäßigen Teilnehmern bei den klassisch gottesdienstlichen Aktivitäten (Sonntagsgottesdienst/Meditationsgottesdienst etc.) Personen mit sehr unterschiedlichem Traditionshintergrund (lutherisch, reformiert, römisch-katholisch, altkatholisch, menonitisch – aber auch sufistisch, buddhistisch ... oder ohne jegliche bewusste traditionelle Bindung). Die liturgische Struktur der gottesdienstlichen Feiern orientiert sich an der lutherischen Tradition, bietet aber scheinbar in ihrer von vielen als „Andersheit“ erfahrenen Form genügend Anknüpfungs- und Einstiegspunkte auch für Personen mit den oben genannten Hintergründen.

### *Ist das Kirche? Einige ekklesiologische Reflexionen zum MLK-Projekt*

Ausgehend von klassischen Theologumena wie „ecclesia creatura verbi“ – „ecclesia semper reformanda“ ist festzuhalten, dass sich Kirche in sehr unterschiedlichen Formen ausdrücken kann.

Wenn zudem Ecclesia nicht anders zu verstehen ist denn als ein prozesshaftes Geschehen (!), in dem Menschen immer wieder auf den Glaubensweg gerufen werden, so gehören unterschiedliche Nähen bzw. Entfernungen zum „bekanntem“ (confessio) Glaubenszentrum zum Kern und Wesen der Kirche und der Kirchengemeinde hinzu (als eine besondere Form des „corpus-permixtum“-Paradigmas).

Im theologischen Zentrum des MLK-Gemeindeprojektes steht die Gottesdienst feiernde Gemeinschaft derjenigen, die in jener Feier ebenfalls unter

anderem „zusammgeführt und im Herzen angerührt werden und über die Perspektive des Alltäglichen hinaus getragen werden“.

Sosehr sich in diesem Zentrum eher klassische Kirchlichkeit manifestiert, können doch nicht alle anderen Formen der Feier und Begegnung, die in näherer oder weiterer Entfernung um dieses Zentrum herum zirkeln, als „nicht [zu Kirche] dazugehörend“ disqualifiziert werden. Auch in jenen „Satellit-Aktivitäten“, die die Kirchengemeinde selbst mit initiiert, werden immerhin Menschen „zusammgeführt und im Herzen angerührt und über die Perspektive des Alltäglichen hinaus getragen“.

Das MLK-Projekt schafft Möglichkeiten für Begegnung und Transzendenzerfahrung sowie Teilhabe (in unterschiedlichen Abständen oder Nähen) an einer gottesdienstlichen Gemeinschaft, die sich in konzentrischen Kreisen/Satellit-Aktivitäten manifestiert, wobei die Möglichkeit der „Kreuzbestäubung“ verschiedener Aktivitäten intendiert ist.

Das Verhältnis der verschiedenen Aktivitäten zueinander ist ein dynamisches, wobei ein Zugehörigkeit ausdrückendes „Ja“ von Teilnehmern zum Gesamtzusammenhang der von der Gemeinde verantworteten Begegnungs- und Transzendenzmomente als ein ekklesiales Moment, ein Kirche und Gemeinde bejahendes und konkretisierendes „Ja“ interpretiert und verstanden wird. So entsteht Kirche als ein sich entfaltender Prozess auch dort, wo die Prozessesteilnehmer dies selbst nicht mit dieser Terminologie benennen. Ob und in welcher Weise es in diesem Prozess zu bekennenden, „konfessionellen“ Momenten kommt, liegt im Prozess selbst verborgen und ist darin theologisch als Handeln des Heiligen Geistes zu verstehen.

### *Das MLK-Projekt – Vier Aspekte sich entwickelnder theologischer Arbeit mit einem „offenen Ende“*

I. „Die Sehnsucht er(ge)kannt zu werden“ oder „sich zu Haus zu fühlen“ – Ein strategischer Anknüpfungspunkt für missionstheologisch motivierte Initiativen, die die Gemeinschaft erfahrbar machen.

Die verschiedenen Ausdrucksformen der im Titel genannten „Sehnsucht“ verdienen es, vor dem Hintergrund ihres Verhältnisses zum locus theologicus der „communio“ reflektiert zu werden. Dies kann die kirchliche Kommunikation „nach außen“ verstehbarer machen und kann zugleich kritische Reflektion überkommener Definitionen des locus ermöglichen.

## II. Neudefinition des Gemeindeparadigmas

Die traditionelle, formelle Definition von Gemeinde in den Grenzen der „eingeschriebenen Mitglieder“ entspricht de facto nicht mehr der vorfindlichen Situation kirchlicher Existenz in Stadtgemeinden wie der beschriebenen. Bei der Reflexion der verschiedenen Nähen und Abstände zu klassischen Sprachdefinitionen des Evangeliums kann es hilfreich sein, den Begriff der „Gottesfürchtigen“ aus der Frühzeit der entstehenden Kirche mit Blick auf die darin ausgedrückte ekklesiale Qualität der Zugehörigkeit historisch und systematisch neu zu untersuchen und zu bewerten.

## III. Personalisierte, „ikonische“ Kommunikation contra strukturelle/organisatorische kirchliche Initiative

In hochentwickelten westlichen Gesellschaften gibt es in zunehmendem Maße ein Misstrauen gegenüber gesichtslosen „Institutionen“, in jedem Fall aber eine Scheu davor, sich institutionell zu binden. Die primär kritische Haltung gegenüber Aktivitätsangeboten von Institutionen (auch gegenüber Kirche als Institution) ist die des Klienten, der in dieser Rolle zugleich seine persönliche Unabhängigkeit zu wahren sucht. Im „Windows“-Zeitalter („Icons“ als primäres Kommunikationsmittel) gilt es darum, auch in kirchlichen Äußerungen noch stärker als bisher bildlich identifizierbar („ikonisch“), d. h. über identifizierbare und ansprechbare Personen, zu kommunizieren. Pfarrern und Pfarrerinnen als sichtbaren Repräsentanten von Kirche und Gemeinde kommt dabei eine wichtige Rolle zu. Zugleich bedeutet dies, dass das Bewusstsein jener Kommunikatoren bezüglich der Kommunikationssituation (Kirche „auf der Bühne“) und ihrer eigenen Kommunikationsformen und Fähigkeiten sowie bezüglich persönlicher und spiritueller Integrität und Authentizität geschärft und geschult werden muss.

## IV. Die Welt Gottes und die vielen Sprachen der Künste

In Gemeinden mit vergleichbaren Strukturen wie der in diesem Artikel beschriebenen sind Kunstformen zunehmend wichtige Anschlussstellen für Kontakt mit Kirche und kirchlichen Themen. Ästhetische Denkkonzepte wie die Umberto Ecos zum „Offenen Kunstwerk“ und eine theologische Hermeneutik, die mit dem Prozesscharakter des Evangeliums als dem sich entfaltenden Wort arbeitet, haben viele gemeinsame Schnittmengen, die Kooperation ermöglichen. Dabei ist kirchlicherseits die Frage zu stellen, wie das Verhältnis von Kunsterfahrung und Glauben theologisch sinnvoll beschrieben werden kann und welche neuen Paradigmen hierbei hilfreich sein können.

*Schlussbemerkungen*

Das MLK-Projekt, dass die latente „Sehnsucht er(ge)kannt zu werden“ nutzt, um im weitesten Sinne Gemeindestrukturen in einer entkirchlichten, hochentwickelten Umgebung neu zu schaffen, wirft zugleich Fragen auf bezüglich gängiger ekklesiologischer Paradigmen und der Formen der sichtbaren Kirche. Die wichtige Rolle der Person als Kommunikator und der Sprache der Künste in der Kommunikation transzendenter Konzepte von Gemeinde/Gemeinschaft und Glauben zwingen zu einer Neuevaluation des Verhältnisses von Kunst und Kirche.