CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

1.1. *Introduction*

When, in 1998, the United Evangelical Mission (UEM)\(^1\) started its “Program for Cooperation between German and Foreign Language Churches”, nobody involved had much of a clue about the field they were entering. The outline for this program had evolved over nearly two years and changed considerably in the process. UEM, a formerly German mission organization which in 1996 had restructured to become a mission community of 35 churches on three continents,\(^2\) wanted to become instrumental in starting one or more international congregations in its German region\(^3\) which would serve as symbolic representations of the international character of the body of Christ. When it was pointed out to the respective UEM committees that international and migrant churches already existed in Germany, the focus of the program was adjusted towards cooperation between German and foreign language churches,\(^4\) even though nobody was quite sure what kind of cooperation was necessary and expected. Consequently, the service instructions for the coordinator of the program described rather vague tasks:

- Compile a list of all existing migrant churches within the UEM German region;
- Make contact with existing migrant churches;

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\(^1\) [www.vemission.org/en](http://www.vemission.org/en).


\(^3\) The UEM German region comprises six regional Protestant churches (German: *Landeskirchen*), namely The Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, the Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau, the Evangelical Church of Hesse-Waldeck, the Church of Lippe, and the Evangelical Reformed Church, and the von Bodelschwingh Institutions Bethel.

\(^4\) For a discussion of terminology, see chapter 2.1.
– Describe experiences and problems of cooperation between migrant and indigenous churches;
– Work to improve the relationship between migrant and indigenous churches;
– Examine structural and legal possibilities of establishing international congregations.

In April 1998, I became the first coordinator of the UEM program, a position I held until the end of 2006. As a trained theologian and ordained minister with more than a dozen years of experience of living and working in Asia, I was considered well-qualified for the position. But nothing I had seen during my work and travels in India and China and my involvement in international congregations in different places prepared me for what I encountered on the new job. I vividly remember my first visit to a West African charismatic midweek prayer service: About thirty men and women meeting in the small, modern sanctuary of the local Protestant church, ecstatically singing “Jesus is the winner man, winner man all the time,” all praying at the same time at the top of their voices, walking around, raising their arms, shaking, kneeling, screaming, crying; the pastor reporting several visions that seemed utterly strange to me—this was unlike any worship service I had seen anywhere before. I was asking myself whether what I saw was even Christian!

Soon afterwards, I attended a big revival service at another West African led congregation. The predominantly black congregation of several hundred people packed the large hall of a German Pentecostal church. There were praise songs at a headache-inducing volume, prayer times during which everybody shouted at the same time, and a sermon by a rather stout Ghanaian guest preacher whose message basically was: ‘If you just pray enough and give tithes and offerings to the Lord, you will become a rich man like myself.’

All of that might not have been so troubling, had it not been for the pastors of these two churches who explicitly called themselves ‘missionaries’, planning to reach out not only to their own nationals, but to Ger-

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