

LOCATION:  
Buchen-Bödighheim, Germany  
COMPLETION DATE:  
2009

ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF  
TECHNOLOGY, CHICAGO  
WITH ECKER ARCHITEKTEN  
BÖDIGHEIM FIELD CHAPEL



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The sheltered interior space offers a place for reflection and mediation. Surrounded by four closed walls, views are limited to the sky and the tower, which encloses the chapel sanctuary.

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The field chapel stands on a hill between three villages.

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Slots in the four main columns define the chapel tower.

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The Field Chapel is a project designed and executed by students of an Advanced Design/Build Studio at the Illinois Institute of Technology College of Architecture in Chicago for an ecumenical church cooperative in Bödighheim, Germany. Led by Professor Frank Flury, the project was supported on a pro bono basis by Ecker Architekten (Buchen, Germany) and carried out with craftsmen, volunteers and locals from Odenwald/Bauland, a rural region in northern Baden-Württemberg. The task of the design team was to create a place of spirituality. Professor Flury defined the project for the 12 students from Alabama, Alaska, California, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Tennessee and China, as "... an interdenominational chapel, a space for people in search of God, a place for quiet reflection, but also one that

welcomes hikers and cyclists who appreciate a rest stop with a sense of beauty." In January 2008, Reverend Moser-Feesche contacted Ecker Architekten with the intention of building a chapel. He had no funding, held no property, and did not have the support of his congregation. He did, however, have a specific idea about what this building should be and where it should be located. After discussing the potential of a Design-Build project with the Reverend, Ecker contacted Prof. Flury and things started to take shape. With commitments from the local blacksmith, carpenter, sawmill owner, and the farmer (whose field the chapel was to be built upon), the town of Bödighheim agreed to implement the project. With the help of countless volunteers, the chapel was constructed in just eight weeks. Over 400 people witnessed the official

benediction in summer 2009. The ecumenical chapel stands on a hill between the villages of Bödighheim, Seckach and Großericholzheim. Visible from afar, it can only be reached on foot or by bicycle via a steep country lane. The students developed outdoor facilities and space as a logical consequence of interaction: arriving at the site, a narrow footpath leads between a hedge and the blank tower façade to a small gravel forecourt, which is bounded on two sides with massive benches made of local limestone. The forecourt represents the secular realm. A brick platform rises from the forecourt, through which visitors access a closed patio and ultimately the sanctuary. The platform represents the passage from the profane to the divine. Surrounded by four closed walls, the view is limited to the sky and the tower, which encloses the chapel

sanctuary. In formal terms, the building has a simple shape, reminiscent both of the biblical Temple of Solomon and the vernacular tobacco-drying barns still found in the region. From the outset, assembly details were designed to ensure the chapel could be completed by students without construction skills. The entire wooden structure was cut on a CNC machine according to student drawings. The receiving slots in the four main columns of the tower for the louvers were subsequently hand routed. Not a single plank was sawn on site.