



The Catholic Kolping Society

THE CATHOLIC KOLPING SOCIETY, also known as the "Kolping Family" is an international organization which now exists in 38 countries. It's international headquarters is in Cologne Germany where it was originally founded by the Blessed Adolf Kolping, a priest who was beatified in 1991 by Pope John Paul II. While it does not exclude non-Catholics from membership, the Kolping Society includes the term "Catholic" in its official title to indicate and proclaim that the principles upon which it was founded and upon which it operates are none other than those taught universally by the Church.

Each country has a National Office and is relatively independent in its operation. There are 13 branches or families within the U.S. with three of these in the New York metropolitan area.

The Nature of the Kolping Family

The Kolping Society is a worldwide organization of local communities of people participating in the Mission of the Church.

The society's aim is to help its members to achieve God's purpose in:

- their marriage and family life
- their professional work
- their life as members of the Church
- and their activity in society and the state

Each individual society tries to provide its members and others whom it serves with a feeling of *belonging*, of being at home, in a Catholic environment.

The Kolping Society or "family" is a place where they can relax together, have fun, enjoy one another, be of service and promote cooperation at all levels.

The Kolping Society promotes the common good in the Christian sense by helping to make society more responsive to human needs.

What are the principles of Kolping?

First among these principles are the sanctity of human life from its inception, the dignity of every life at every period of its existence and the invitation on the part of Jesus to each of us to live our life with holiness and dignity so that in and through Him we come to everlasting life.

Kolping Membership

The Kolping Society is open to men and women, young people and senior citizens, to active church members, not only Catholics but those in agreement with Catholic teaching and practice. The Society asks of each who will be a member to be open to the change that Jesus makes in the life of each who comes to believe in Him and to be daring enough to effect a change for good in each of the areas of his or her influence.

Ideals

Every Kolping member is to achieve full maturity in Christ so as continuously to reach out to become the full person that each of us is called to be in every situation in which we find ourself.

Citizenship

While sponsoring no partisan allegiance, the Society encourages its membership to be active on each level of government, guided always by the Christian principles that each ascribes to by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Goals

As a means of fostering the wholesomeness and health of the larger community, the Kolping movement dedicates its efforts to encourage and protect the Christian family unit.

In relation to the larger community in which Kolping members live, the member is encouraged and challenged to be a decisive influence for good in each community in which he is an integral part—his neighborhood, parish, city, and in his or her business and club memberships.

Education

The Kolping Society endeavors to provide education in the teachings of Jesus Christ, that when followed, gives the happy blend of the sacred and the secular. This education means a strengthening of their relationship with the Church which, through Word and Sacrament, makes present the Faith founded on Jesus, thereby distinguishing their lives here and preparing them for everlasting life.

Kolping's Legacy

Father Kolping's legacy to us is his life work, his program, his ideals and goals; but most important his very example of recognizing his calling, to make a personal commitment to his calling, and to carry it to fulfillment. No obstacle is too great to overcome if we have faith, work hard, and are willing to make commitments.

Who was Adolph Kolping?

Adolph Kolping was born December 8, 1813, in Kerpen, Germany. He was raised in a family of sheep herders. The family was poor but rich in love and faith in God. At the time of his birth, Europe was still feeling the effects of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and the Industrial Revolution was in progress. These were troublesome times, full of change and hardships.

Kolping's teaching about the family was in part derived from the positive influence of his own family: the material situation is not the deciding factor for the life of the family members, but the "spiritual atmosphere." The "apostle of the family," as Adolph Kolping is often called, was able to gather experiences and gain insights in his

home, which later led him to describe the irreplaceable importance of marriage and family for individuals as well as for society in the following terms:

The first thing man finds in life, and the last thing he tries to hold on to, and the most valuable thing he possesses in life, even if he doesn't realize it, is family life.

The Shoemaker and the Priest

From early childhood it was Father Kolping's wish to become a priest, but because of the poverty of his family, at the age of 13, he entered an apprenticeship as a shoemaker. For ten years, he Kolping worked at his trade, and it was these years that made him aware of the many problems that young people were facing.

At the age of 23, Kolping was able to begin studies to prepare himself for the priesthood. He unconditionally committed himself to his chosen goals. And in 1845, at the age of 31, Father Kolping was ordained a priest in the Minorite Church in Cologne, Germany. His apostolate was directed to the young craftsmen or journeymen of his time and he became known as the "Father of the Journeymen." The Society he founded for them in 1849 is now called by his name. It was intended to provide a Christian environment for the young men as they developed their work skills, while, at the same time, offsetting the dangers to faith and morals that were evident with the Industrial Revolution. He devoted his life to improving the circumstances of these young people.

Initially, his objective was to provide a home-away-from-home for young apprentices and journeymen while they learned a trade that would enable them to make a decent and honest living. At the same time he would school these young men in the Christian principles that would serve as a guide for their personal, business and community life.

The Kolping House, as it later came to be known, was more than a residence. It was a place to relax and have a good time. The priestly presence — in the person of Father Kolping — was the Father figure and role model. Father Kolping's place within the Society has become the position of the *Praeses*, as the Kolping chaplain is called, and is primarily one of guidance — teaching by word and example how to live in a secular world without losing or lessening the sacredness of one's life, combining in his ministry the sacred and the secular.

Soon after starting his work in Cologne, the city was stricken with cholera. Kolping offered his pastoral services for the sick and dying in the Civic Hospital, thereby jeopardizing his own life and the continuation of his journeymen's association. He commented that the Good Lord would not let his work die, if He was in favor of it. He recognized the victims of cholera as "neighbors" who cannot be picked to suit personal preference.

*The Traveler, Writer
and Newspaper Publisher*

The years between 1849 and 1862, saw Father Kolping traveling, writing and publishing his own newspaper; all in the attempt to spread the work of his Society. The press at that time was often hostile where religious life and teachings were concerned. Kolping offered material that would benefit his Catholic readers. In 1854, he published his own weekly 16-page newspaper, called *The Rhenish People's News* after the region in which it was published. The paper reached, not only journeymen but a wide circle of the population. The income received from Kolping's journalistic efforts made the expansion of the Journeymen's Association possible — and in turn the Kolping Society as a whole. Kolping became known in wider circles and this opened up opportunities for the further expansion of his ideas and activities.

His sufferings and death

Kolping suffered a great deal not only in his personal life (the early death of his mother and sister, and his father's death on the eve of his ordination), but also by distrust and envy while working for the Journeymen's Association. He also suffered serious physical ailments which did not deter him from his work with the journeymen. He died on December 4, 1865 shortly before his 52nd birthday. He summed up his attitude toward suffering in the following words:

We don't need to go looking for suffering, but whatever comes our way, we should and must turn to benefit in a Christian way.

There is total harmony of theory and practical application of knowledge and life which can be seen throughout Kolping's life. This is one of the most important points concerning Adolph Kolping's being a saintly man. He had unlimited trust in God and confidence in the power of prayer.

Kolping was full of exuberance in spite of continuous worries and problems. He could see positive things and fun in daily life. His openness and joyfulness in dealing with others was an important factor in his personal charisma, especially with the young people, and one of the reasons for the Society's success. Kolping joined the young men in jovial get-togethers in the hostel's community rooms, but retained their respect by not becoming too much of a buddy to them. Here are a few more quotations from his writings:

The human life cannot exist without joy, without fun, least of all during youth. Thus joy and fun deserve an essential place in community of life.

If everyone does his best wherever he is, the world will soon look better.

Let's practice more and deeper love towards people. Let's show Christian living in ever more practical ways and the present will be better and the future brighter.

I always achieved more with prayer, however inadequate it might have been, than with any human concerns and efforts.

I will look for contentment in the thought of having done everything in my power required by my situation in life; nothing else will give me true satisfaction or real peace.

Growth of the Kolping Movement

At the time of Father Kolping's death, there were 420 branches with a membership of 25,000. At the present time the Society has over 370,000 members in 38 countries, which are divided into approximately 3,500 local groups, known as Kolping Families. In the last few years, Kolping has become an example for the people of the Third World, and there has been a rapid build-up of Kolping Families in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In these Continents, the aims set by this Catholic-social movement has found a particularly good reception.

Today's Challenge

Over the years, many revolutions have occurred that have separated the Kolping Society from the Industrial Revolution. Along with changes for the better, these changes have also brought some serious dangers for the fabric of society, as well as to the foundation of Faith. The major thrust of the Society, at least in the United States, is directed toward the *family unit* itself, providing places of assembly more often for married couples and their children to meet and to socialize, rather than residences for single people — always within the framework of the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church.

The Kolping Society's greatest challenge is to reach out to the young men and women in our

cities and rural areas and offer them the anchor of faith that gives stability to their lives.

The New York Kolping Family

The New York Kolping Society was started on October 14, 1888 by Theobald Dengler, a Kolping member in Germany, with the aid of Karl Loerwald who was born in New York. Their purpose was to provide a Kolping Society for young journeymen who arrived from Europe without friends or family.

The present Kolping House, located in the Yorkville area of Manhattan, was built in 1914 as a men's residence, with 88 private rooms. Among its facilities are a small chapel for weekly Masses and a ballroom which is used for Society functions, dances, meetings, luncheons, dinners, concerts, etc.

The New York Kolping Society also operates another residence called "Kolping-on-Concourse" in the Bronx. The residence provides 100 comfortable and clean private rooms for mature men and women including dinner daily, in a very active community. There is an elegant dining room, lounge, a chapel where Mass is celebrated daily, sitting rooms, laundry room, TV-card room, elevator and garden. The residence observes religious feasts of the Catholic Church and holds many parties throughout the year for residents and their guests.

In keeping with Father Kolping's ideal to nurture the Christian family, the Society purchased a 50-acre estate on the Hudson River in 1954 to be used as a summer retreat for the members and their families.

Another Kolping family is centered in the diocese of Brooklyn, and there is also one with its headquarters in Passaic, New Jersey.

Information about the New York Kolping Society can be obtained by calling (212) 369-6647.