

## **International – Committed – Practicing Solidarity**

### **The Self-Image of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL**

#### **Preamble**

*“The needs of the times will teach you what to do.”  
(Adolph Kolping)*

The self-image statement presented here shows that, as an international membership association, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL accepts the challenges of the present and the future. This self-image is a binding foundation for all members, leadership personnel, and staff, as well as all of the Association’s branches and facilities.

The values and subject matters formulated in this self-image paper give the Association the opportunity to endorse the universality of its values without necessarily implying a uniformity of its forms and expressions. This self-image of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL can therefore develop in a great variety of manners in different cultural contexts.

#### **I. Our basic principles**

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL, founded and shaped by Adolph Kolping in the 19th century, is a global and cross-generational education and action community. A family-like community, its work is shaped by mutual trust, the readiness to engage in dialogue and the ability to deal with conflict situations. As a Catholic social association, it feels at home in the Church of Jesus Christ in the tradition of the Second Vatican Council and it makes its contribution to the world mission of Christians autonomously and independently. The basic principles for the objectives and activities of the Association come from three sources:

##### **Person and message of Jesus Christ**

Adolph Kolping’s work arose from his faith in the person and message of Jesus Christ. The acknowledgement of Jesus Christ and the faith in Him is the basis and guideline for our actions even today. The person and message of Jesus Christ point the way to a successful life. We are called to give witness to a togetherness that is formed by love, founded in a common hope, and steeped in a deep faith.

##### **The social teaching of the Church**

The social teaching of the universal Church, in the encyclicals of the Bishops of Rome, as well as in the texts of local Churches and national and continental church-related panels, give at all times indications as to what a social order of economics and society, which is based on the Christian concept of man, should look like. From it, the members of the Association receive help and inspiration in their personal commitment to social justice. KOLPING INTERNATIONAL itself

participates in words and deeds in the updating and further development of the Church's social teaching in the different regions and cultures of the world.

The dignity of the human person, solidarity and subsidiarity, the common good, and sustainability are the basic principles of our actions in the Association and, at the same time, the guidelines for the future.

### **Adolph Kolping's vision and action**

Adolph Kolping demonstrated an exemplary Christian life by placing himself at the service of other people to help shape this world. By means of a comprehensive range of educational and living assistance, of spiritual and material support measures, he wanted to help young people in particular to develop their identity and thereby, at the same time, motivate and enable them to fulfill their responsibilities in their family and in their work, in society and in the Church. In light of the signs of the time, his vision and actions remain a guiding light and goal of all our organizational activities.

## **II. Our objectives**

*"Active love heals all wounds – mere words only increase the pain!"  
(Adolph Kolping)*

The ethical and social, economic and ecological problems in a globalized world call for a socio-political commitment of the Association and its members. KOLPING INTERNATIONAL takes a stand for the unconditional protection of the value and the dignity of human life from the beginning to the end. As a Catholic social association, appealing to and integrating all ages, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL accepts these challenges in accordance with the principle of the dignity of the human person. Here, help for self-help pursues an all-encompassing approach and focuses on the tasks of education and formation, qualification, and guidance.

We aim to

- offer people a home in a cross-generational community in which they can continue their spiritual and economic development together;
- empower one another so that we can prove ourselves in the world, and thus in work and our occupation, in marriage and family, in the Church, in society, and government;
- offer counseling to one another and to those who live around us;
- promote the common good in the Christian meaning of the word in all our activities and contribute to the constant renewal and humanization of our societies;
- in particular assist those people who are marginalized in society and in the Church, to realize and utilize their opportunities and potential;
- attain a more equitable distribution of the earth's goods and their sustainable use for future generations around the world.

All activities are to be aligned to ensure that a well preserved ecological, social, and economic system will be left for future generations. Sustainability is a key objective which is taken into account in the

project and educational work of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL and also applies both to all initiatives of the Association and to the private lives of every single member.

The Association therefore strengthens the commitment of its members for just and decent living conditions all around the world and a Church that will always approach people with her message of love and joy.

### **III. Working together as partners for the One World**

*“When sharing joys and sorrows with one another, one grows together.”  
(Adolph Kolping)*

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL is open to people from all regions and cultures, regardless of their descent or social background, their age or gender, their religious or political beliefs, their sexual orientation or physical and mental condition. It promotes the mutual interests of its members according to the cultures and traditions of the various regions and provides opportunities for new and varied experiences.

All over the world, members live and work in the spirit and tradition of Adolph Kolping. In different cultures, this tradition is brought to life in different ways. As an international family-like community, we as members, as Kolping sisters and Kolping brothers, learn from one another through encounters and partnerships. All members of the Association have the same rights and obligations.

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL is committed to respect and defend human dignity. People need to be enabled and given the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves and the community in which they live.

We stand in solidarity with one another and build viable structures of help for self-help. Here we meet mutually and acknowledge each other as equals. This results in the democratic self-image of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL, in which all administrative positions and assignments are considered as service and are determined by means of equal and free elections.

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL is a dynamic community in which people join forces in the service of building a fairer world and are committed to improving their own quality of life and that of the people around them. Thus, we want to give people hope and support them on the path of a good life. This service to the One World becomes visible in the Association especially through working together in partnerships. People from different levels of the Association and from different regions of the world get involved in strong and lasting partnerships, in which cultural, spiritual, and material exchanges take place. The fact that different countries and regions are taking on shared responsibilities for one another is a vivid expression of the joint service to the One World and their coexistence in the spirit of solidarity. Prerequisites for this co-operative partnership are awareness of and tolerance for other ways of life.

The successful integration of people from various cultures and religions into the respective society is possible only by means of respecting each others' rights and obligations.

The diversity of talents and the willingness of the members to commit themselves in the world and for the world constitute the heart of the international work of the Association. The multi-faceted societal correlations, in which each member but also the Association as a whole stands, give our community the opportunity to shape society and the Church regionally as well as internationally.

#### **IV. Priorities of our work**

*“One’s courage grows, the greater the obstacles are”  
(Adolph Kolping)*

In the service of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL in the world, all areas of human life in their diverse contexts and interactions are taken into account. In the family-like and cross-generational community, every single member should get involved with all his or her interests and needs and is entitled to receive encouragement and assistance with respect to vital matters and problems. Each Kolping sister and brother experiences and gives help – in accordance with his or her own strengths and abilities.

Today, the various areas of life are closely intertwined for many people. Since we are aiming for a holistic development of men and women, the priorities of our work are also interconnected. Thus, the work of the Association and its facilities is focused primarily on education and life-long learning. Education, work and occupation as well as marriage and family have a special significance in the tradition of the Association. Giving consideration to these areas of life is particularly urgent in our time, too.

The framework for the configuration of new work priorities is this paper on the “Self-Image of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL”, the International Constitution and the Program of our Association. Our work is based on two principles. On the one hand, there is the principle of help for self-help, which is achieved primarily through education, training, qualification, and guidance. The poverty in vast parts of the world, with simultaneous superabundance in other parts, is recognized as a permanent scandal and becomes the responsibility of every member of our Association. The gulf between abject poverty and wasteful affluence must be closed by making decent work possible and by concrete actions of international solidarity. The search for answers to the social issues of each individual country as well as those of the world community remains the most urgent task of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL.

On the other hand, we see the earth as God’s creation, which is entrusted to all human beings. This is why our service in the world also takes future generations into account. That means that all activities everywhere and at all times have the goal that a well preserved ecological, social, and economic system will be left for future generations. The aforementioned aspects for a sustainable future are taken into account in the Association’s project and educational work. That is the only way for a viable and just world to be possible in the future.

### **a) Education and life-long learning**

*“To educate means to design, mold, shape, and the sharper and the more perfect that happens, the more fitting and the more substantial will the advancement of the education be.”*  
(Adolph Kolping)

Education is a primary focus of our work. It is a human right and the basis for an independent life. Personal and especially religious education create a person’s identity. We understand education to be a life-long stimulation of an individual’s overall strengths so that these can develop and he or she can become an independent person who practices solidarity and is able to cope with life. Thus, through the acquisition of knowledge, education also means the development of moral attitudes which help to find one’s own place in the world as well as orientation as to how to act and live one’s life. Such an education, which touches both the heart and the mind equally, is most often linked to a community. Values such as solidarity, civil courage, and taking responsibility for those in need are practiced and can be experienced in our community and in our projects.

### **b) Work and occupation**

*“We can do much, if only we really want to; we can do great things, when competent forces work together.”*  
(Adolph Kolping)

People have the right and the obligation to earn a livelihood for themselves and their families through their work. For KOLPING INTERNATIONAL, human labor is not only a necessity to secure one’s livelihood, but also an opportunity for achieving one’s potential and – as a service to the community – the world mission of Christians. Gainful employment, family work and volunteering are generally to be regarded as equal. The members of the Association are willing to take basic and advanced vocational training and to make a personal commitment in the context of the given opportunities to participate in the world of labour. KOLPING INTERNATIONAL attaches special significance to a humane configuration of the world of work, and in this, it is oriented along the principles of the Catholic social teaching as well as the standards set out by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In the tradition of Adolph Kolping, those who cannot participate in the labor market receive special support, so that everyone gets a chance.

### **c) Marriage and family**

*“The root of mankind is the family.”*  
(Adolph Kolping)

Trust is earned where people are united in loyalty and love and are there for each other on a long-term basis. For us, marriage and family represent an important prerequisite for the personal development of human beings and thus also for the evolution of a humane society. KOLPING INTERNATIONAL respects people’s choices of how to live their lives.

The Association stands up for the protection and an appropriate appreciation and the safeguarding of marriage and family in society and in Church. Its members want to give witness to the values that are lived and strengthened in marriage and family. People who have sole responsibility for raising their children require particular support and solidarity.

#### **d) Society and state**

*“It will depend upon Christianity’s spiritual and practical expression being transmitted into everyday social life.”  
(Adolph Kolping)*

According to the Christian understanding, every human being is the creator, the one responsible, and the objective of all societal institutions and is thus equipped with inalienable human dignity. We are fully committed to the right to life of every human being, from the first to the last moment.

The objective of the social commitment of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL is always the common good. In the societal discussions as to what should constitute the common good and how this could be achieved by means of good governance, the Association therefore participates on the local, regional, national, and international level and strives to build and co-shape civil society structures. As a rule, members do this on a volunteer basis and without any self-interest.

The protection of human rights, including economic, social, and cultural rights, is a particular concern for KOLPING INTERNATIONAL. The integrity of creation and the bringing about of a sustainable lifestyle as well as an economic system that serves the people are of great urgency in our century. We therefore are actively involved in protecting the environment and we participate in measures to stop man-made climate change.

The Association is a learning field, generates contacts, and raises awareness of the generations for one another. A commitment to society and its issues must be satisfying and meaningful and must allow for fun, personal growth and responsibility.

A sustainable society requires the involvement of people of all ages. KOLPING INTERNATIONAL enables people so that they can make their contribution to this endeavor.

#### **e) Culture and leisure time**

*“The human heart cannot exist without joy, without fun, least of all during youth; they have a rightful place in the life of the Association.”  
(Adolph Kolping)*

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL sees an important task in providing its members access to all areas of cultural life. This introduction to past and present cultural creativity is an important contribution to meaningful recreational activities. We expect from one another the effort to make the best possible use of our own strengths and skills and put them creatively at the service of the community. The diversity of cultural forms of expression and their preservation are considered a gift of the internationality within the Association and is promoted at events and meetings.

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL is committed to Sunday being a day of rest, for the family and the community, of culture and of religious life.

#### **V. Participation and shared responsibility in the Church**

*“Life rests on faith”  
(Adolph Kolping)*

The services in education, in work and occupation, for marriage and family, in society and state, in culture and leisure time are performed by us out of love and care for our neighbors. All people of good will are part of God’s people and share in the Church’s mission of salvation. This mission also includes shared responsibility for the path of the People of God on earth.

A spiritual and religious life is the source of our commitment. For many people, this happens through the personal encounter with Jesus Christ and finds its expression in prayer and in ardent love, listening to the word of God and in the celebration of the sacraments. This fundamental attitude characterizes the work of the Association and its members and helps in addressing current issues and challenges.

In coming together, the members of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL express and exercise their freedom of assembly and association within the Church. We are aware that personal and shared responsibility in the service to heal the world can be carried out only in close communion with the local Churches, and that its spiritual roots lie in the universal Church as the community of God’s people. Being open to dialogue and working together with people of different religions and denominations is a major concern for us.

The members of the Association belong to the Church through baptism and, as part of God’s people, they fulfill their shared responsibility for the Church. As a Catholic social association, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL plays an important bridging role between the Church and society. As a Catholic association with ecumenical openness, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL asks Christians of all denominations for collaboration and deliberately seeks dialogue and cooperation with other religions and confessions.

As an Association of dedicated lay people, we are willing to work together on all levels in the various panels in the leadership of the Church and to actively participate in the respective initiatives and tasks. Since its very beginning, our Association has practiced cooperation on a partnership basis between lay people, bishops, priests, deacons, and members of religious orders. This continues to be indispensable for us. The baptized members are willing to take on shared responsibility in their parishes and dioceses. This calls for a respectful interaction based on dialogue. However, the autonomy and self-determination of the Association must not be compromised by this cooperation.

## VI. Outlook

This self-image paper describes the principles and values basis of our actions as an Association. In the various regions of the world, the members of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL fulfill the described priorities of work in their different ways. Depending on demand, priorities can be emphasized and dealt with or even new work priorities may be uncovered by any given regional association.

Common symbols, songs, and rituals are outer signs of the inner unity of our world-wide community.

The national associations and the Kolping Families are called upon to put their work into concrete terms on the basis of this self-image and the International Constitution of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL – taking their societal circumstances into account. In this we are guided by Adolph Kolping's mission: *"The needs of the times will teach you what to do."*

This self-image paper takes effect following its approval by the XXXIII. International Convention in Lima (Peru) on September 26, 2017. It is meant to serve as the basis for updating the International Program.

Should discrepancies arise in the process of translating the document, the German version shall prevail.