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Declaration of the Kolping Society Europe on 'Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations'

In 2002, an action plan for promotion of active ageing was adopted by the UN. The EU took up this initiative and declared 2012 to be the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Such a measure alone is an evidence of significant demographic changes faced by Europe. The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations will assist the EU in encouraging the workers to remain longer in employment as well as in reducing of social exclusion of older people from participation in life of their community; this will also provide elderly persons an opportunity to enjoy an independent life as long as possible. These goals are to be achieved by the introduction of active ageing strategies directly in the field of work-related activities, the promotion of voluntary work and increased social engagement of older people, measures aimed at healthy ageing as well as by strengthening of solidarity between generations.

Challenges presented by current demographic trends

Intense ageing of the society in Europe - both within and outside the EU - is clearly observable since approximately 1980. The population of the EU countries of about 501 million people includes 87 million persons aged over 65. It is expected that the percentage of those aged over 60 will reach 25 % of the total population by 2030. The likely future situation is that each two individuals of employable age will be responsible for one older person; as for now, this responsibility is shared by four persons. The cause of this tendency is a dramatic decrease of the birth rate which is approximately 1.5 child for one family. In order to maintain a stable population size a total birth rate of 2.5 is needed. In addition to the birth rate decrease, an average life expectancy has been increased up to 79.4 years due to numerous initiatives focused on health care advance and improvement of living conditions. Another cause of ageing of the society especially in the countries of South, Central and East Europe is the emigration of young people who leave in search of better career chances for countries outside the EU. As a result of the increasing ageing of the European society and further consequences affecting the employment sector the policy tends to extension of working lifetime and increase of employment quote for individuals over 55 years on the one hand and targeted encouragement of immigration from countries outside the EU on the other hand. However, demographic changes affect not only the employment sector, but also coexistence of different generations. The increasing burden imposed on the younger generation can definitely lead to conflicts between generations.

Active ageing and solidarity between generations

The concept of active ageing refers to a process of optimization of preventive health care, social participation and protection aimed at improvement of life quality for older people. It is to enable older people to take an active part in social life with a consideration of their respective abilities and to provide them sufficient protection and care in life situations requiring additional assistance at the same time. Awareness thereof and willingness to admit the fact that all generations are able to and

have the duty to make their respective contribution to economic and social life within the limits of their abilities and aptitude will arise from solidarity between generations.

The Kolping Family as a cross-generational community

Strengthened solidarity between generations requires structures that create possibilities for communication and cooperation of different generations. Due to diverse changes of family structures the family as a solidarity model between generations is virtually declining in importance even though currently existing solidarity between generations still plays a central role in families. The Kolping Families as cross-generational communities have the chance and the task to make the dialogue between generations possible as well as to find and to forge the path to solidarity between generations.

The Kolping Family as the motive force of active lifestyle

The Kolping Families are able to and have the duty to participate in the promotion of an active lifestyle of their older members by means of their own programmes. This includes programme offers aimed at physical training encouragement for the older generation, conveying of intellectual aspirations for education and travelling as well as arrangement of sociable meetings providing communication opportunities to like-minded individuals. Such a wide range of programme offers is exactly the way to contribute to increase the physical, emotional and mental welfare of older persons, as their participation therein is enhancing their health thus enabling them to take an active part in social life.

The Kolping Family creates framework conditions for solidarity between generations

Many older people are ready and able to take a part in voluntary activities for the sake of the society. A Kolping Family focused on joint society shaping is capable of accumulating willingness of its older members to be socially engaged and channeling their efforts into undertaking of socially productive activities; by doing so building a society where disease, dependence and exclusion will never be identified with old age is possible. The Kolping Families should attach the key importance to fostering of solidarity within generations and between generations at achieving of these tasks. Maintaining of contact to people in need and ill individuals of the same generations, passing on of experience-based knowledge within and between generations as well as arranging for specific solidarity efforts thereby crossing all generation borders can be vital steps on this way. Still existing solidarity shared with each other is strengthened not by the feeling of being needed and doing something meaningful only; it is often inspired by personal approval and appreciation of an individual.

Social and political contribution of the Kolping Society needed

Demographic changes require enhanced initiatives in order to involve the population in measures aimed at active ageing as well as to counteract age discrimination. The Kolping Society as a cross-generational community contributes to seeing older people not as a burden but as a helpful resource for younger generation as well as to getting rid of aged-based stereotypes. The Kolping

Society as a Catholic community and a civil society force takes an active part in public discussion and exemplary demonstrates the way in which cooperation of generations can be arranged as well as possibilities of mobilizing potential of older people. The same applies to both social cooperation chances and successful models of older people integration into occupational activities.

Within the scope of its social engagement the Kolping Society enters into public dialogue with other socially engaged groups and governmental agencies on sustainable pension and aid systems as well as on establishing of care and assistance institutions for people who need permanent care.

The Kolping Society contributes to lifelong learning

The Kolping Society as an education-oriented community with own educational offices and educational institutions realizes the necessity of contributions in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is not only an essential requirement of the rapidly changing employment sector but also a precondition of an active participation in social life. In this respect cooperativeness of the young and seniors creates chances to learn from and about each other too. The older ones offer experience-based knowledge and opportunity to touch the living history, the younger ones can be guides in the jungle of the modern media world.

The Kolping Society creates a space for dialogue on religious issues

With age the questions like 'What is the true and underlying meaning of life?' and 'What is a human?' become more and more intensive. The ups and downs of life are retrospectively interpreted against the background of Christian message and own life experiences. For those who hold their belief firmly and cherish it through administering the sacraments and offering prayers this can provide support; otherwise it results in prompting of new existential questions.

The expertise in life and faith of the older people is not to be underrated; opportunities for an appropriate exchange are to be created instead. This experience should also be used for passing on the faith to the next generation, as this day in many families there is need for clarification - if not for resolving the tension - in respect of the religious practice of the parents as well as of the religious education and spiritual guidance of the children.

Approved by the Continental Assembly of the Kolping Society Europe on 16 September 2012 in Bolzano / Italy.

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Kolping International

In 1849 the Catholic priest Adolph Kolping founded an association in Cologne for single journeymen in order to give them some help in solving their problems caused by the industrial revolution and being summarized with the term „social question“.

At the beginning it was a small association, but meanwhile it has developed to a world-wide society that counts today about 7,000 regional groups and 450,000 members in 61 countries. In spite of the enormous growth and the changed situation in society the Kolping Society has remained true to its original task and is still working towards the solution of the social question. However, this work is not only limited to the national level, it also includes the international level.

The Kolping Society sees itself as a Catholic social organization. It supports its members in a special way in developing their personal talents, it offers help to its members and society as a whole and it promotes the common good in the Christian sense with the activities of its members and groups.

The work of the Kolping Society is aimed at the integral individual, who is not only offered help and stimulation in all aspects of life, but also provided with an opportunity to share his problems and also his knowledge and skills. It is the close interconnection and interrelation of the individual spheres of life, which is the starting-point and the ground for the comprehensive work of the Kolping Society and its service towards the integral development of the individual.

According to this approach the work of the Kolping Society concentrates on the following aspects: work and profession, marriage and family, society and state, culture and leisure time.

The Kolping Society is a democratically structured organization, and therefore it feels responsible for the promotion of democracy, too. It also fights for the special human dignity in any phase of life and for the inalienable and inviolable human rights.

The Kolping Society in Europe feels in a special way obliged to the European idea – owing to its historical development and its programme – and co-operates intensively with the Council of Europe and the European Union or the European Parliament. Since 1974 it has held the „Consultative Status at the Council of Europe“ in Strasbourg as NGO (Non-Governmental Organization).

A special sign of this intensive co-operation are the European seminars realized annually for 30 years (1979) in Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe).

Owing to its world-wide commitment it has furthermore the „Consultative Status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations“ and was admitted to the „Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations of the International Labour Office (ILO)“.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 the International Kolping Society saw an important task in contributing to develop a civil society in the formerly communist states, and it did so by building up independent National Organizations. Meanwhile active organizational structures have developed in many Central and East European countries, like for example Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Albania etc.. These Kolping Societies have picked up important fields of activity like youth and family work, general and professional training, promotion of small enterprises and social work, but also socio-political education, and they have also undertaken urgent social tasks in self-responsibility.

Although the Kolping Society was founded in Europe and has still kept its international head-quarters in Cologne, it has extended its fields of activity all over the whole world in the meantime. The promotion of the international co-operation and solidarity is a central and important task, and the International Kolping Society contributes with its work to solve the international social question.

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