



Adolf Rester co-founded the Rochester chapter of the Catholic Kolping society in 1926. He served as the organization's president from 1934-49 and, at age 90, continues to attend society meetings.

Erik Kunkel/Photo Intern

Kolping Society still close to founder's heart

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Adolf Rester still feels he owes a debt of gratitude to Blessed Apolph Kolping and the society which bears his name.

But by all measures, Rester has repaid any possible debt many times over since Aug. 1, 1926. On that day, Rester and fellow German immigrant, William Wittmann, established the Rochester chapter of the Catholic Kolping Society.

In the ensuing years, Rester has served the Rochester group in a myriad of capacities. He served as its president from 1934-49, and, at age 90, he continues to attend Kolping Society meetings.

During Rester's time with the organization's local chapter, the group developed an orchestra and sports teams, provided support for members suffering during economic hardships, and coordinated relief efforts for Germany following World War II.

In looking back at his efforts on behalf of the society, Rester simply declared, "I'm paying back to Father Kolping for what I received in Germany."

What Rester received in Germany was a place to live, inexpensive food, companionship and support as a Catholic workman after joining the Kolping Society in 1918.

Born in Eisleben, Germany on Dec. 28, 1901, Rester was a student before becoming an assistant mining engineer during the troubled economic times following the end of World War I. He then turned to the society for help.

"They provided some houses for members," Rester recalled. "I lived most of the time in the Kolping houses."

Those houses and the movement it-

self were born out of Father Kolping's dream. Born 1813 in Germany, he was a shoemaker and journalist before becoming a priest in 1845.

Concerned about the needs of young men who were involved in trades, Father Kolping created a "journeyman's society" in 1849 that later became known as the Kolping Society. The society was intended to help the men remain committed to their faith while performing their occupations proficiently and being responsible parents and good citizens.

Father Kolping died April 4, 1865, and was beatified by Pope John Paul II on Oct. 27, 1991.

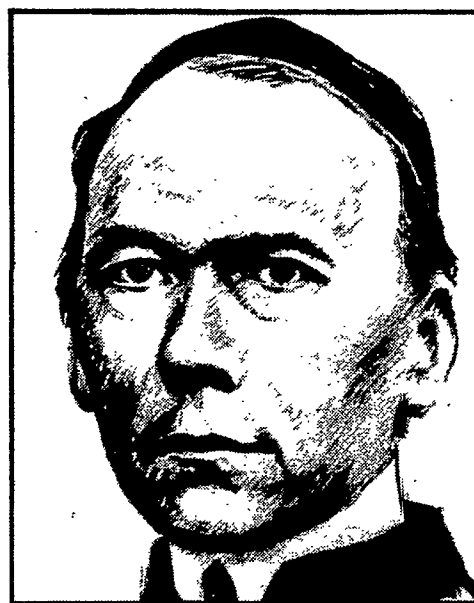
Meanwhile, the movement that he created spread to cities throughout Germany, then to other nations. Chapters can now be found in 38 countries, with a combined membership of approximately 370,000.

Members helped to spread the organization as they moved away from their German homes, Rester said, adding, "Father Kolping said, 'The members of the Kolping Society, they are my best apostles.'"

Rester himself became one of those "apostles" after he lost his job in Germany and moved to Rochester in 1926 to live with his aunt and uncle. He found jobs as a mechanic for various Rochester companies before working for 25 years at Eastman Kodak Company.

Two years after arriving in Rochester, Rester co-founded the local chapter of the Kolping Society. Initially the local group's goal was to provide a social and support organization for fellow German Catholics.

"The support was the most important thing," Rester recalled. "If a fellow said, 'I have to go out of my home,' (because he lost his job), we would put him up."



Father Adolph Kolping created a journeyman's society in 1849, intended to help men remain committed to their faith while performing their occupations and being responsible parents and good citizens.

The society held monthly meeting and sponsored regular Masses and breakfasts, Rester said.

By 1929, the local chapter had grown to include approximately 65 members, according to Rester. The chapter had changed its criteria to allow non-Catholic members as well. In addition, a lady's auxiliary had been created in 1928 because of the number of girlfriends — and wives — who also began coming to the meetings.

Rester himself married April 28, 1934. He and his late wife Rose Mary Glatz Rester — who died Feb. 21, 1989 — remained active with the Kolping Society even while raising three children.

But this was not the case with all members, Rester noted. As they mar-

ried and began raising families, they started moving away from the society.

Nevertheless, the local chapter survived. After World War II, the local group — under Rester — even sent 1,000 packages of relief supplies to two dioceses in Germany.

One of the highlights of the society in Rochester, Rester said, came in 1951 when the chapter hosted the Kolping Society's national convention. By this time, Rester had stepped down as president to pay closer attention to his family, but he was honored as a co-founder of the local group. And he and his wife — who served for many years as president of the ladies' auxiliary — remained active in the society.

Rester still lives in the home he shared with his wife of 54 years — a home decorated with pictures of his wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He also has collections of pipes, and agates — a tribute to his early days as a mining engineer.

"It is still my interest," he said.

Still active with the society, Rester noted with some sadness the fact that it is not attracting new members. He explained that there are fewer first-generation German immigrants who might be inclined to join, and that the children of earlier immigrants — including his own — were not interested.

The same is true of many such fraternal societies, noted Rester, who was also a member of the Knights of St. John.

"All the societies are not getting new members," Rester said. "Nobody joins."

But as long as he is alive, the Catholic Kolping Society of Rochester can apparently count on Adolf Rester.

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