

PATRIARCHAL GREETING

TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE YOUTH CONFERENCE

MY LIFE IN CHRIST

Chicago, Illinois, USA

July 14-20, 2014

Beloved in the Lord Very Reverend Fr. Philip Tolbert,
Dear in the Lord spiritual children,

We are pleased to greet you with fatherly affection on the occasion of your annual youth conference, "My Life in Christ" in Chicago, Illinois, from 14th to 20th of July 2014.

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph, your diocesan bishop, shared with us your satisfaction with last year's gathering conducted under the spiritual guidance of His Grace Vicar Bishop Daniil and your spiritual mentor, Very Reverend Fr. Philip Tolbert.

We rejoice at your affection for each other and especially your determination. Despite the long distances and financial difficulties, you will reunite yet again with youthful enthusiasm to spend some blessed days together, through the intercessions of the three Johns-your heavenly patrons-St. John the Theologian, St. John of Rila and St. John of Kronstadt.

We are truly glad that the theme of your discussions on those days will be the Light of Christ. You know from the Holy Gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ said of himself: "*I am the light of the world*" (John 8:12). Despite His light, however, spiritual darkness still drapes over the whole world. The time that we live in is bleak, despite the comprehensive technical and cultural progress. And it is getting darker here on earth. People try to outdo each other in shams. Distrust and uncertainty afflict every human soul. We cannot imagine what next steps we will make even coming out of the temple of the Lord. There is fear and uncertainty about tomorrow. Mankind has invented many types of light rays-not for enlightenment, but rather to kill their own kind. Many families live in darkness, unbearable toils, uncertainty, and anguish. For many people, life is a nightmare. The light is missing.

So it was also when our Lord Jesus Christ walked on earth. After His appearance, however, "*the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, Light has dawned*" (Matthew 4:16).

Here's what you need, not only to contemplate during the conference, but also to take home afterwards: Know that the Savior has already come to earth. He brings us out of the darkness, heals the blind, pardons sinners, comforts sufferers, soothes the weary and burdened. With His Divine love and teaching, the Lord Jesus Christ enlightens the world to this day. Rays of His light have been shining and warming the world for more than two thousand years. Many people have seen that His light illumined their path and made them sons and daughters of the light (see John 12:36). We see shining works in the lives of many saints who received the Lord's light. In

places where there were once brothels, monasteries are now built-spiritual centers of education and culture. All those who have received the light of the Holy Gospel have achieved abundant success.

This is also the goal of the theme of your conference – to be light, to walk in the light and to share it with all those around us. In the present day, we must direct our eyes toward the embodiment of this goal – the Lord Jesus Christ. He shines and warms the souls of people all over the world.

So if you adopt Christ's morals and live in Christ's light and peace, then you can expect a better future. A family, in which the light of Christ shines and in which relationships are based on mutual affection, thrives and flourishes. A soul that reflects the light of the Spirit of God is transformed and enlightened.

Our fatherly prayer for you is this: May the Lord shine on your conference with His uncreated light and give all of you wisdom and strength!

With blessing and love in the Lord,

+ NEOFIT

PATRIARCH OF BULGARIA