

PATRIARCHAL GREETING

To the Participants of the Youth Conference
"My Life in Christ" of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese
of the USA, Canada, and Australia
13 - 19 July, 2009
Des Plaines, IL

Dear Rev. Fr. Philip Tolbert – spiritual director,
Dear John Tolbert – responsible supervisor,
Beloved in the Lord, young spiritual children,

We are pleased on behalf of the holy Synod and on our behalf to greet you paternally with yet another diocesan youth conference "My Life in Christ", which is being held from July 13-19, 2009 in the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church "St. Sophia" in Des Plaines, IL.

We rejoice every time that our brother and your diocesan bishop, Metropolitan Joseph, shows us pictures of you and tells us with love about your good efforts, about your friendship with the Lord, about your desire to keep your hearts pure and as Orthodox young people to live in every piety and good conscience.

It is our consolation to hear that under the heavenly protection of your three patron Johns – St. John the Theologian, St. John of Rila and St. John of Kronstadt – your conferences are so desired by you, that you not only wanted them to be longer at your own Mt. Tabor, but also wished that they would continue to be a place of making good friends, of getting to truly know each other, and with the blessing of Father Philip, of mutual promise for common union throughout your lives. His Eminence even gladdened us with the news that he was happy to have married 10 couples in three years, five of which this year, of young men and women who had been participants for many years at your annual diocesan youth conferences.

This means that the grace of the Holy Spirit gathers you every year to keep the unity of the Spirit by activating the ties of love and peace for every good purpose – ecclesiastical and personal.

You all know that life is not a joke. Life is a serious matter. It passes quickly but continues. It is in front of you. We know for sure that you are all looking for it. We pray that you find it ... not in food and drink, not in clothing and material wealth. From our many years of experience we assure you that it is a gift of God, a treasure and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The question is: How can you find the kingdom of God and His righteousness here on earth at your age? In order to find it, you have to look for it. You must also know where to look for it, without, of course, losing time which is very precious for you. Therefore you need knowledge and effort. We are sure that you will hear during the conference that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; that is, not in our righteousness, but in God's,

which is found in the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:17) and becomes our possession through the communion with the Holy Spirit.

Now, during this conference, for example, you will have profitable time. Let each one of you evaluate deeply his whole life until now. Let him know, however, that the measure of truth is in God. That is why, in order for your evaluation to have true life significance, you must transform yourselves and all your lives. The Spirit of God must take over your soul so that your righteousness may be God's righteousness – the righteousness of young people, who are ready to do holy works (Romans 6:19).

It is our hope that you not only carry the kingdom of God within you by having the righteousness, the peace, and the joy of the Holy Spirit in your hearts, but that you will also participate in the fulfillment of God's command to sow it in the souls of others, so that it may grow and fill all people. Then they will become like you – new people, carriers of God's kingdom in themselves (Luke 17:20-21), the salt and the light of the earth (Matthew 5:13-14).

May God grant you wisdom and strength through the prayers of St. Sophia, in whose house you are gathered, so that your conference is fruitful and unforgettable.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

+Maxim, Patriarch of Bulgaria