

PATRIARCHAL GREETING

TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DIOCESAN YOUTH CONFERENCE

MY LIFE IN CHRIST

Santa Rosa, California

July 8-14, 2013

Very Reverend Father Philip Tolbert,
Beloved in the Lord Representatives of the Bulgarian Orthodox Youth Apostolate,

We are happy to send our first Patriarchal congratulatory letter to Father Philip, your spiritual adviser, and to all of you on the occasion of the Annual Diocesan – My Life in Christ Youth Conference, this year in California, July 15-21, 2013.

As long time friends and spiritual brothers in Christ with Metropolitan Joseph, we have many times rejoiced with the late Patriarch Maxim when he shared with us his customary message before sending it to you. Being now in his position by God's mercy, we would like you to accept this message of good news from the Mother Church and from all of us, who fondly remember your pilgrimage trips and look forward to seeing you again.

The last year's visit of the group of young people, led by Father Tolbert and Popadia Junia to the Troyan Monastery during the Feast of Holy Dormition will remain especially memorable. At that time the unforgettable Dedo Patriarch Maxim blessed us from the monastery balcony with a prayer that the Holy Troyan Three-handed Theotokos keep us under her protection. Now under that same Holy Icon in the monastery church, his mortal remains are laid to eternal rest.

With great pleasure we share the fact that Metropolitan Joseph and we have been brothers of the Troyan Monastery, the same monastery which you, too, have found during your stay to be a blessed garden of the miracle working Holy Three-handed Theotokos of Troyan.

Your rendition of "It is truly meet to bless, you, O Theotokos" by Peter Dinev, sung during the Divine Liturgy in Bulgarian, as well as the five hours of beautiful singing, when thousands of pilgrims were being blessed with holy water, are still resounding in our ears. As your Patriarch we are so glad that during the Vespers and Orthros, the young people from your choir - John Miller, Tim, Gabriel, Theo and Mike, were so helpful with their beautiful chanting.

It is always truly meet to magnify The Holy Theotokos as the ever-blessed and most pure Holy Virgin Mary who gave birth to our Lord. Jesus Christ is our divine Teacher, Who is the truth Himself and through Whom the ultimate dignity of man has been attained. He is the Light of the world, and He does not want any one of us to walk in darkness (John 12:46). He says about Himself, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim the freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). He is the One, Who brings comfort to the despondent and suffering hearts (Isaiah 61:1-2) and Who says: "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

We prayerfully wish you a successful conference so that you may go home filled with wisdom, faith and joy, and become ardent messengers of the Word of God in His Name and for His glory.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!

With paternal love in Christ,

+ NEOFIT

PATRIARCH OF BULGARIA