

PATRIARCHAL GREETING

To the participants in the Diocesan Youth Conference “My Life in Christ”
Indianapolis, Indiana, July 10–15, 2012

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

We greet you with fatherly love on the occasion of your annual diocesan youth conference “My Life in Christ” in the capital of the state of Indiana—Indianapolis.

Our beloved brother and your diocesan bishop, Metropolitan Joseph informs us regularly and in gladness about the ceaseless labors of your spiritual counselor Fr. Philip Tolbert, and about the grace of your spiritual and physical growth in all godliness and purity. We are happy that all of you actively participate in your parish affairs throughout the year and are now gathered, together with members of your parish councils, at the annual diocesan conference, which goes not without the praise of God and His blessing (Wisdom 15:19), through the intercessions of your patron Saints: St. John Chrysostom, St. John of Rila and St. John of Kronstadt.

We know, beloved, that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15), but in order to be wise, fit for every good work and saved through faith in Christ Jesus, you have to take instruction in righteousness. Therefore, let us watch and be sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Esteem highly those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord (5:12-13) and be patient with all (5:14). See that none of you render evil for evil to anyone; but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. Do not quench the Spirit. Test all things; hold fast what is good (5:15-17, 19-21). *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”* (1 Thess. 2:19-20)

You should also remember that *“your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). This Spirit is the Spirit of truth, through whom we are saved and without whom it is impossible to have light and wisdom of spiritual things and true knowledge of God. Being a temple of the Holy Spirit, you are the temple of love, temple of life in chastity, temple of great comfort and joy.

The words of the blessed Paul to the Corinthians may sound strange indeed: *“You are not your own.”* As enlightened by God’s word, however, you understand that anyone who claims to belong only to oneself cannot expect to find a place in our parish and diocesan life. For all of you live with love for your family and neighbors and sacrifice for them. As young Orthodox Christians, you give praise to real patriots and remember them with thanksgiving. After your baptism, you belong to the Church of Christ. As God’s people, you belong to all mankind. The world is now smaller. The personal destiny of every one of you affects not only a community in Bulgaria, in the United States, in Canada or in Australia, but all mankind. We know that as active participants in modern telecommunications, you understand this very well.

True are the words of the Holy Apostle Paul that you are not your own, since you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. For you are redeemed from the bondage of sin by the precious blood of His Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. This means that you belong to God, whose will you must follow and obey.

True, you are free to do all kinds of things, especially now at a young age. But are all these things helpful, and would you be brought under the power of any? (1 Cor. 6:12) Thus, keep the law of God, do His will and choose only what is helpful for you and for all mankind.

May the Lord grant you health and wisdom; a successful and productive conference. We pray that the grace of the Holy Spirit raises all of you to be servants of the Living God. As St. Gregory the Theologian says: those of you who wish to be chanters, may He make psalmists as King David and the Prophet Amos; may He take the wise among you and make them judges of elders as the Prophet Daniel; should He find fishermen among you, may He bless them to catch the whole world in the net of Christ the Word; if He finds publicans among you, may He make them fishers of souls; if He finds an ardent persecutor of the faith, may He modify his zeal and convert him as Saul into Paul.

“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 1:4)

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Maxim, Patriarch of Bulgaria