

PATRIARCHAL GREETING

To the Popadias and Deaconissas of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of the USA,
Canada and Australia participating in their Annual Conference

July 12-13, 2012
Indianapolis, IN

Beloved in Christ Popadias and Deaconissas,

We greet you with fatherly love on the occasion of your annual gathering on July 12 and 13 in Indianapolis, Indiana. We praise you for contributing, along with your husbands and delegates of the annual diocesan council, to the success of the spiritual life in the diocese.

We receive detailed annual reports from Popadia Junia Tolbert about your work during those blessed gatherings and we rejoice over the love amongst you—a bright expression of which are the colorful photographs we often receive and review with paternal joy.

Our brother in the Lord and your diocesan bishop, Metropolitan Joseph, also continues to share with us his satisfaction with your active parish involvement and invaluable help to your husbands—our worthy clergy. This truly enriches your own prayer and spiritual experience, especially when you have an example in the Mother of God and Holy Virgin Mary. And what a blessing it is that you always conclude your conference program by singing her Akathist and praising her as the Queen of the Heavenly Host and Defender of our souls.

It is the Mother of God that we would like to focus your enlightened attention on in our message to you. We are convinced that you honor her with great zeal, as we do, and wisely seek her constant protection. She is truly the tabernacle of God's grace and of the words, acts and life of her Son.

We owe her almost everything we read in the Holy Gospel. True, the Holy Evangelists have recorded what they witnessed, but it is apparent that the Mother of God knew everything about our Lord Jesus. For even before He appeared to the world, she was enlightened by the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed her for conception. She bore Our Lord in her most pure womb with love and praise to God, Who made her blessed among women. She witnessed His coming to this world. From her, the Holy Evangelists heard about the miraculous birth of the Son of God, since none of them witnessed this magnificent event. And everything that happened with Jesus Christ, until He began His ministry in the world, the Evangelists learned from the Mother of God. Of course, she knew many things about the life of the Lord Jesus that have not been recorded. A part of that has been bestowed to the Holy Church, which keeps it in Sacred Tradition. We praise her as Queen of the Heavenly Host, because she is the first Evangelist of the words and acts, of the life and miracles of Jesus Christ. She is worthy indeed to be cherished as the Mother of our spiritual life.

Assured by the news we receive every year that you continue to seek the true life of Jesus and the Mother of Life, we pray with our hearts that divine life is rejuvenated in you. During this year's gathering, offer praise, petition and thanksgiving to the Mother of God. Offer her also the humility and piety of your heart. With the lighted candle in her honor, also light up the undying fire of your faith and love.

As you enter the temple to read the Akathist, turn that day, and your whole gathering, into a celebration of piety for the holiness of your souls. At the end of the Akathist, as you approach to venerate the Joy of All Who Sorrow icon in Indianapolis, offer her in whisper the prayer of your heart. All this is good, but even better is to always contemplate the image of the Mother of God and to kiss it with clean lips, as you are our popadias and deaconissas.

We pray that, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos, you have a blessed gathering filled with spiritual rejoicing. May you live under the Protection of The Most Holy Mother of God, and through Her prayers, always be handmaidens of God.

+ Maxim

Maxim, Patriarch of Bulgaria