

† Neofit  
Patriarch of Bulgaria

**PATRIARCHAL GREETING**

To the Popadias and Diaconissas in the Bulgarian Orthodox Diocese of the United States, Canada and Australia, on the occasion of the two-day gathering coinciding with the Diocesan Annual Convention in Detroit, Michigan, USA  
July 19-20, 2018

Dear Popadia Junia Tolbert - organizer,  
Beloved in the Lord Popadias and Diaconissas,

With fatherly love, we congratulate you on your 13th annual conference coinciding with the Annual Diocesan Convention in Detroit, Michigan, on July 19-20, 2018.

It is a praiseworthy yearning to gather in the spirit of unity by standing firm in our Orthodox faith and actively maintaining the bonds of peace and the relationships of friendship.

From the wonderful letter and color photograph sent to us by Popadia Junia last year, we are filled with gladness that, as wives of our priests and deacons in your God-blessed diocese, going on 14 years now, you are eager to meet, to see each other, to break bread and salt, to remember glorious times, and to share new parish successes, despite the long distances between your home parishes.

It is very useful that, in the name of the Lord, this year you will have the opportunity to organize your future plans and good intentions for spiritual and material growth, not only in your parishes, but also in your beloved diocese.

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph won't stop telling us about you and praising you for your devotion to be around-the-clock with our parish fathers, for your "good hearts" in ministry, family and life, for your tenacity to pray, sing, read or stand for hours at your parish churches, especially when he is visiting you as your Metropolitan.

Let me share with you that this Conference in the Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Church "St. Clement Ohridski" will not be only educational for you but also amazing, because of the grandeur and the beauty you will enjoy inside the temple and outside in the parking lot. You will be impressed by the extraordinary iconostasis, the Bishop's throne, the frescoes and the renovated halls, offices and classrooms – renovated on account of your gathering and the Annual Convention, thanks to the special \$3 million donation by our blessed parishioner Mike Ilich. (May God count it to him!)

Of course, unforgettable memories of the magnificence of the church and the dedication of the organizers of your two events will be preserved for you especially by our young priest Father Antonie Poposki, his Popadia Sashka, and their two boys Luca and Stefan.

In the host church, you will admire the stewards of our largest church in the Eparchy. We have visited it in the past as a guest of Metropolitan Joseph, when the parish priest was the Stavroforen Ekonomos Panayot Pamukov, with Popadia Sylvia Pamukov. The parishioners are known for their love for the Orthodox faith and for the equal-to-the apostles enlightener of our people, first bishop St. Clement Ohridski, the celestial protector of your conference and meeting.

It is worth knowing that for 35 years, St. Clement as an archpastor showed in works that Holy Orthodoxy is the right faith and life according to this faith. According to St. Clement, however, one cannot lead Orthodox life according to Orthodox faith unless one has the other great virtue—love. Ancient wisdom says that if you replace the power of love with the love of power, you as humans will have another name. You know it ... .

In the works of St. Clement Ohridski, we read that we should guard against deeds contrary to love. His ministry, as our first archpastor, testifies to him as a cleric with a merciful heart, full of love and gentleness. The merciful heart is a heart in which there is love. Such a heart regrets sin. Deeds contrary to love, deeds against our neighbor, are sins for which we need to repent.

Our fatherly request to you, the participants in this conference, is to continue to carry the spiritual cross in your life, to pray for all, to comfort, to strengthen in faith, and to share the fate of many of the believing people who work to amend the lives of children—both those born of you and your spiritual children, comforting them and mentoring them with love, tenderness and care.

We pray that the generous and merciful Lord will grant you a peaceful, happy conference, full of “the newness of the Spirit” (Rom. 7: 6), “in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). And may you be constantly “renewed in knowledge according to His image” (Col. 3:10).

The blessing of the Lord be with all of you.

/Signed/  
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