

PATRIARCHAL GREETINGS

**TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE THIRTY NINTH ANNUAL CONVENTION
OF THE BULGARIAN DIOCESE OF USA, CANADA AND AUSTRALIA**

Des Plaines, Illinois
July 18-20, 2014

Your Eminence, Your Grace,
Beloved in the Lord fathers, brothers and sisters, spiritual children,

It is with heartfelt and fatherly joy that we congratulate you on the occasion of the 39th annual diocesan convention.

His Eminence, your diocesan Metropolitan Joseph, shared with us that this year's council is hosted by the newly consecrated Bulgarian Orthodox Church "St. Sofia" in Des Plaines, IL, with parish priest V. Rev. Father Gruyo Tsonkov and president of the church board, Dr. Mihail Nikolov.

As you have gathered many times in this church of ours, you know from experience the warm hospitality of Bulgarians in Chicago and especially of Fr. Gruyo and Popadia Paraskeva, whose fame as a masterful chef has reached all the way to Bulgaria. This year you will also be welcomed by the beauty of the new iconography in the dome of the church, and the stained-glass work underway. We believe that all the beauty of God's house will inspire you in your work as convention delegates and hearten your resolve to make lasting decisions with an eye toward even greater success in the holy pastoral ministry of your diocese.

Through the grace of God, and with ceaseless efforts, we strive to keep our faith strong here in Bulgaria. With hope in Him, and with a clear conscience, we labor to prevail over the challenges of our time.

We have elected four new worthy metropolitans – Antony of Central & Western Europe; Yoan of Varna & Veliki Preslav; Seraphim of Nevrokop; and Naum of Ruse. Now the Holy Synod is in its fullness with the addition of these young members. Full of grace, wisdom, and strength, these laborers of God's vineyard endeavor for the good and welfare of the people in our Patriarchate.

In Fall of 2013 we made a peaceful visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate with a delegation that included your diocesan Metropolitan Joseph. This year we participated in the Pan-Orthodox Assembly of the heads of the local orthodox churches in Istanbul, which on the Sunday of Orthodoxy unanimously proclaimed that in 2016 there will be a Pan-Orthodox Council to consider and solve important problems in our church life as Orthodox Christians.

Remembering the meetings with your representatives in Bulgaria and our three visits before the Patriarchal election as personal guest of Metropolitan Joseph, we do not cease to bear witness to

your sincere faith, which we are sure you still maintain. Therefore, looking toward the future, we hope that God will continue to grace us with His mercy on the path we naturally pursue towards well-being and prosperity.

True, the modern man all too often seems to think that he determines on his own whether to be happy or unhappy, healthy or sick, successful or not. But an unbiased review of history, including the history of our own lives, should convince us that not everything is in our power. You are believers, and you know from experience that the source of life and well-being is God, in whom we believe and whose name we confess.

So, when we come upon adversities, we strive to exclaim as did the righteous Job: *“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1:21).

You especially, the delegates of the convention, have to rely on the gracious and perfect will of God. Being attentive to God's statutes, the teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church, and the voice of your own conscience, you must pray to God at all times throughout your diocese, and hope in His mercy, for God is our refuge and fortress, and He comforts our soul (Psalm 61:6, 9).

As your Patriarch, we long to hear that you remain steadfast in the high calling of the Orthodox Christian, banishing from yourselves every sin, and glorifying the name of God not only in your churches but also in your hearts, so that with God's help and joint efforts, you may prevail over the difficulties of our time and ministry.

Once again, we greet all participants in the 39th annual diocesan convention and pray that God may grant you physical and spiritual health, and teach you the way you should go (Psalm 1.42:8) to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

God's blessing and grace be with you and your entire diocese in the United States, Canada and Australia. May all of you aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness, fighting the good fight of the faith and taking hold of the eternal life (1 Timothy 6:11-12). Amen.

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Patriarch of Bulgaria