

Patriarch Daniel urges young people to bear witness to Christian values at ITO 2026 opening in Bucharest



His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel urged young people attending the 2026 International Orthodox Youth Meeting (ITO) in Bucharest on Tuesday to have the desire to courageously bear witness to Christian values.

The Patriarch of Romania emphasized that „the young Orthodox Christian who loves God and others discovers and bears witness to the truth that the Crucified and Risen Christ offers humanity His humble and merciful love—a love that frees us from selfishness and brings peace and joy into family life, friendship, and community”.

Full text:

We Joyfully Welcome You to the City of Joy!

The International Meeting of Young Orthodox People, organized in Bucharest from 31 August to 3 September 2026, brings together participants from different countries and represents an event of Christian communion and joy, a witness to Orthodox fraternity, as well as a concrete opportunity to intensify the mission of

young people in the life of the Church today.

The theme of the meeting is Young People, Family and Life in Christ, with the event taking place in the context of The Solemn Year of Christian Family Pastoral Care and the Commemorative Year of the Holy Women in the Calendar (Myrrh-bearers, Martyrs, Nuns, Wives, and Mothers) in the Romanian Patriarchate.

In a rapidly secularizing society, the Church reaffirms the truth that the Christian family is a living cell of the Body of Christ, an icon of Christ's love for the Church, and that marriage is not merely an administrative and social event, but a Holy Mystery, or a spiritual Sacrament, of God's love for humanity.

Within the Christian family, as a space of selfless or generous parental love, children grow as unique persons, learning filial and fraternal love, as well as God's love for all people. For children and young people in the Christian family, faith is lived and handed on through prayer as an expression of love for God and through good works as an expression of love for one's neighbour.

Children and young people are gifts from God to the family, the Church, and the people. Through their Christian upbringing, they can become not only good citizens of their earthly homeland but also citizens of the heavenly homeland, that is, saints commemorated in the calendar of the Orthodox Church, such as the eight saints of the family of Saint Basil the Great.

Since youth, in this passing world, is a symbol of the beauty of the everlasting life to come, God has implanted in the hearts of young people a longing for the pursuit of a higher purpose, for holy love, and for eternal life.

This is evident in the account of the rich young man in the Gospel, who realized that perfect happiness is not found in limited and passing material possessions, but in the eternal love of God (cf. Mark 10, 17-21; Luke 18, 18). Therefore, he asked the Lord Jesus Christ: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10, 17).

The Holy Gospels show that our Lord Jesus Christ blessed children (cf. Matthew 19, 13-15) and held young people in great esteem. All three of the resurrections from the dead that He performed during His earthly ministry were those of young people.

The Lord Jesus Christ raised from the dead the son of the widow of Nain, the daughter of Jairus, and His friend Lazarus of Bethany. He raised these young people from the dead out of merciful love for their families, but also because He wanted to reveal that youth is a symbol of the beauty of the everlasting life in the Kingdom of

Heaven (cf. Matthew 22, 30).

It is also significant that many of the disciples who followed Christ were young, as were some of the disciples or spiritual sons of the Holy Apostle Paul. They were named Tychicus, Trophimus, Tertius, Timothy, and Titus. The latter two went on to become bishops: Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete. The Holy Apostle Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy: “Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4, 12).

The Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, the youngest of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, addresses young people with these spiritual words of advice: “I write to you, young people, because you are strong, and the word of God remains in you, and you have overcome the evil one [...]. The world is passing away, along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God remains forever” (1 John 2, 14 and 17)

Christ’s love for young people today is revealed in the fact that a young Orthodox Christian who seeks communion with God and with others participates in the liturgical life of the Church, thereby sharing in the humble and holy love of the Most Holy Trinity.

The pious young believer carries that love into family, ecclesial, and social life. In this sense, a young Orthodox Christian is a blessing to his family, a role model for other young people, and a missionary within the life of the Church. To be young in the Church means, above all, having the desire and courage to bear witness to eternal Christian values in a world fascinated by ephemeral models and values.

The young Orthodox Christian who loves God and others discovers and bears witness to the truth that the Crucified and Risen Christ offers humanity His humble and merciful love—a love that frees us from selfishness and brings peace and joy into family life, friendship, and community.

For the education and formation of children and young people in the faith, the Romanian Orthodox Church continually develops programs and projects at both the local and national levels, as well as international meetings of young Orthodox people.

These gatherings help young people understand that the Church is not merely an institution, but something much more: it is the great family of the Most Holy Trinity's love for humanity, a living community in which each member is called to offer his or her gifts for the benefit of those around them and of the community as a whole.

Dear young people, we warmly welcome you to Bucharest for the International Meeting of Young Orthodox People! Since the name of Bucharest, the capital of Romania, spiritually means "the city of joy," we welcome you today with joy and hope that you will experience that joy here each day.

You are welcomed with great joy to the National Cathedral in Bucharest not only by the many saints painted in Byzantine mosaic, but also by all the hierarchs, priests, deacons, and young Romanian people who wish to help you grow together in prayer, dialogue, and friendship, thereby strengthening fraternal Orthodox communion among people of different nations.

We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ may bless all the participants in this International Meeting of Young Orthodox People!

† Daniel

Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church

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