

Man's friendship with God, the surest light of life: 2023 Orthodox Youth Int'l Meeting begins in Timisoara



The International Meeting of Orthodox Youth ITO 2023 began Thursday evening with an inaugural ceremony in the Park of Roses in Timișoara in western Romania, focusing on man's friendship with God as the foundation of fellowship between individuals and peoples.

Participating in the opening ceremony together with His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel and Metropolitan Ioan of Banat were Bulgarian Metropolitan Naum of Ruse, Greek Metropolitan Georgios of Kitros, Katerini and Platamon, Archbishop Timotei of Arad, Antiochian Bishop Qais Sadiq of Erzurum, Romanian Bishop Lucian of Caransebeș, Serbian Bishop Lukijan of Buda, as well as assistant bishops Emilian of Crișana of the Archdiocese of Arad and Paisie of Lugoj of the Archdiocese of Timisoara.

Numerous central and local officials were present, including Secretary of State for Religious Affairs Ciprian Olinici, EduMin counsellor Romeo Moșoiu, Timiș County Prefect Mihai Ritivoiu, Timiș County Council President Alin Nica and Mayor Dominic Fritz.

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The Rector of the West University of Timișoara, Prof. Dr. Marilen Pirtea, represented the academic environment.

The wall of atheism crumbled in Timisoara in 1989

After the Men's Choir "Contrast" from Timișoara interpreted the national anthem of Romania, His Eminence Metropolitan Ioan of Banat held a welcome speech.

"I urge you to be good Christians in the countries where you each live. Love your country, love your Church, because you are the living icons of the Church," His Eminence told the young participants.

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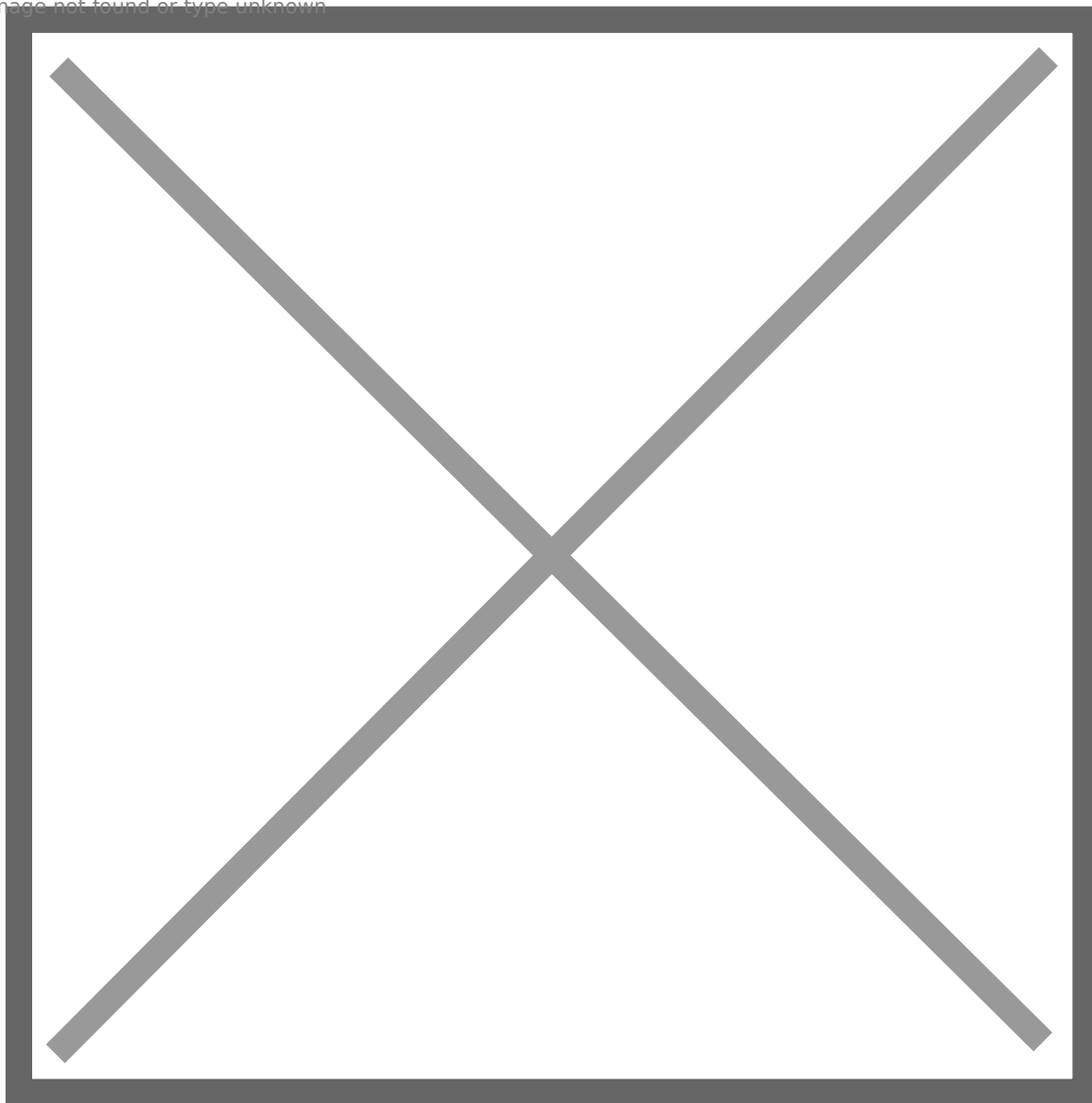


“Stay with your priests, don’t leave them alone. At the altar, the priest takes your prayers and calls on the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit to transform the grain of wheat into the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he offered us as bread of life.”

The metropolitan remembered that in December 1989 in Timisoara, “the wall of atheism crumbled, and Christ was allowed to walk freely in this city and all the cities of our Romanian nation.”

His Grace Bishop Paisie of Lugoj officiated a Doxology to ask for God’s blessing upon the participants. Following the Te Deum, the delegations of young participants were presented.

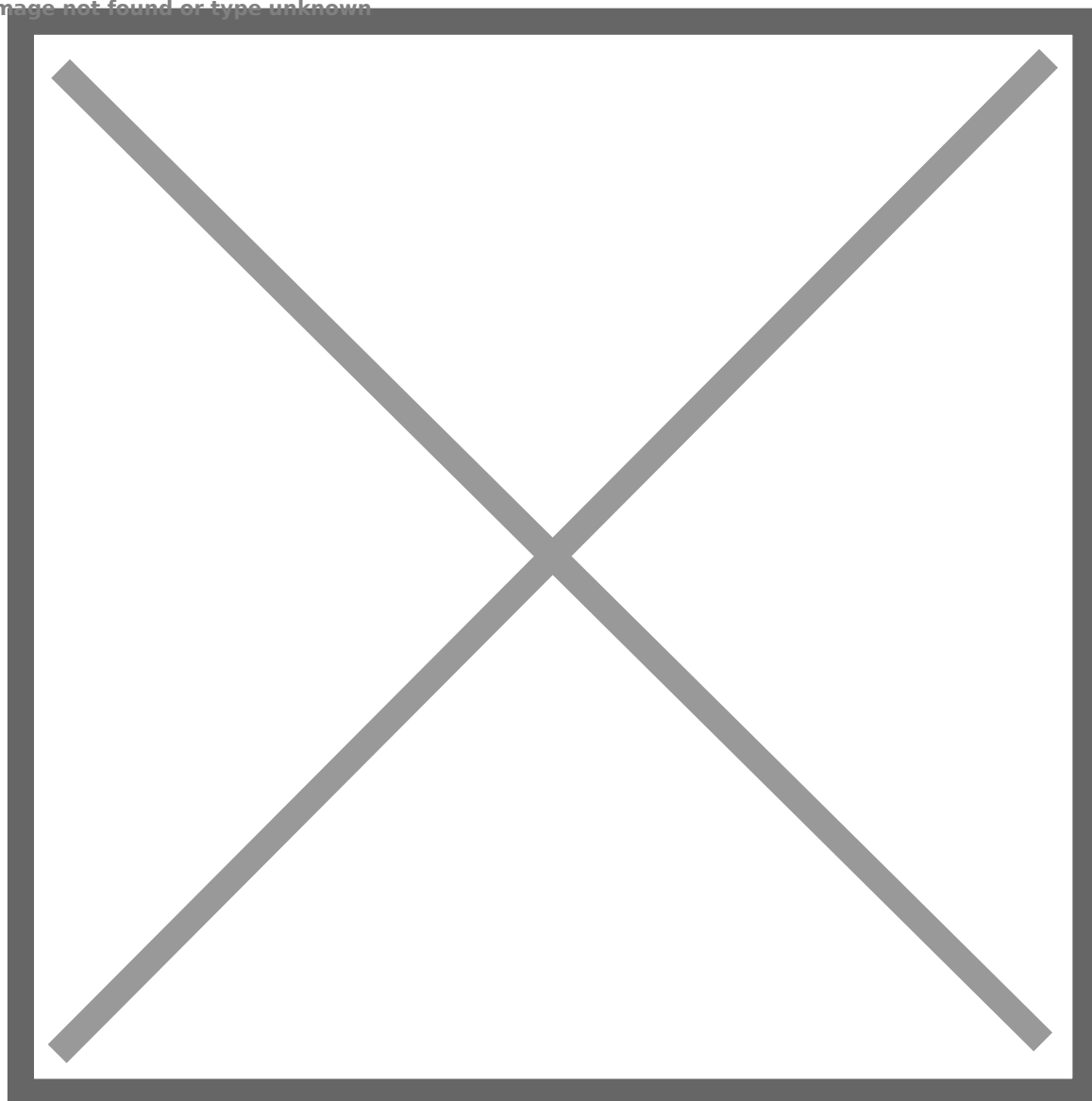
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Participants included young people from all dioceses of the Romanian Patriarchate, including the historical territories inhabited by Romanians around the borders and from the Romanian diaspora, as well as youth representing the sister Orthodox Churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Bulgaria, and Georgia, the Orthodox Churches of Greece, Poland, Albania, Czech Lands and Slovakia, and the Archdiocese of Ohrid and North Macedonia.

Man's friendship with God, the light of life

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The ceremony continued with a speech by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel.

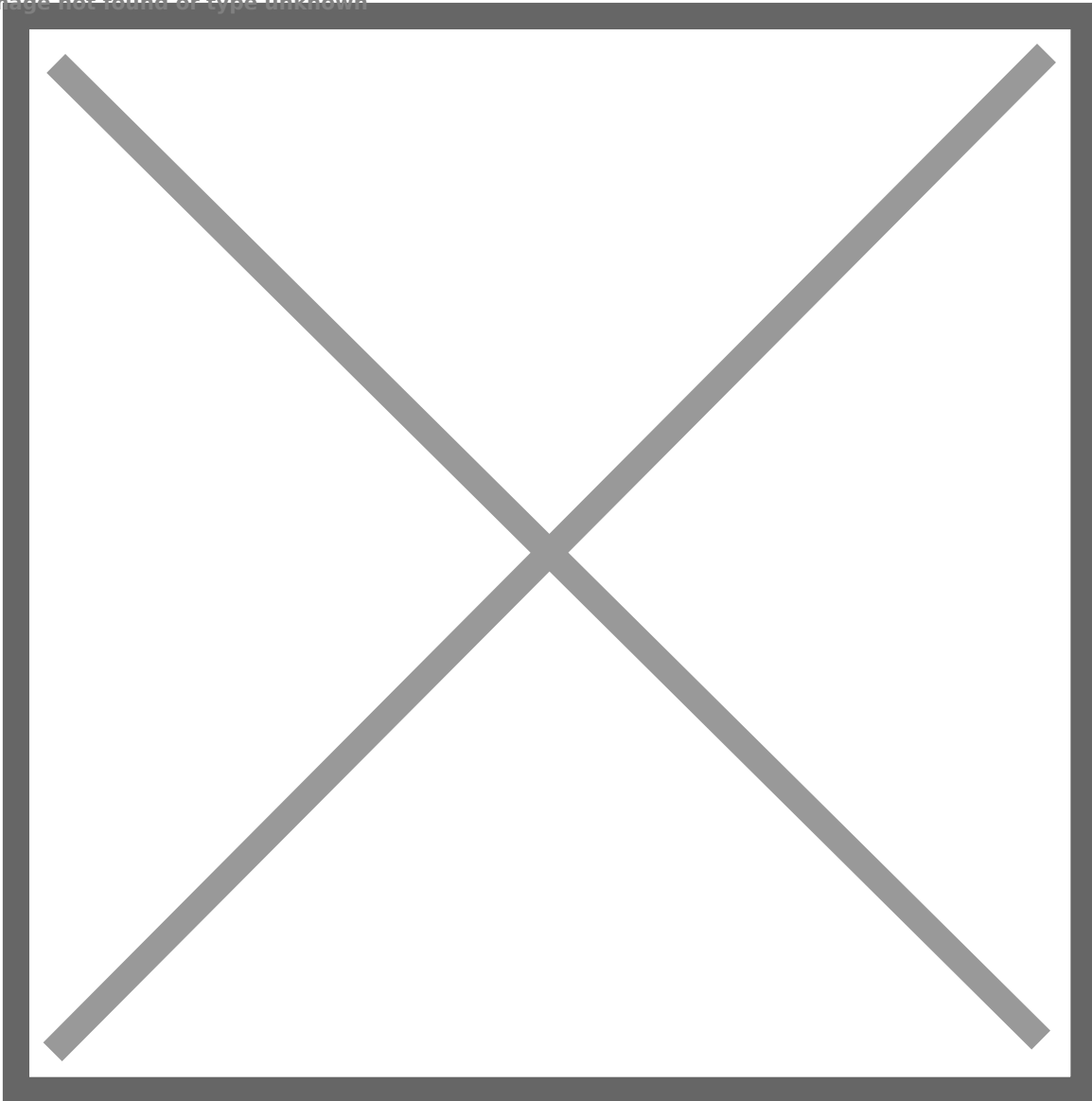
Reflecting on the ITO 2023 theme, the Patriarch of Romania emphasised that “man’s friendship with God, through prayer, and with his fellow people, through good deeds, is the surest light of life, the light that everyone will bear in their souls at any age, in any place, in time and in eternity.”

“Young people are a blessing and joy for the family, the Church and the people”, the Patriarch of Romania also noted.

“Therefore, the Church is called to convey to young people Christ’s love for children and youth and to help them become friends of Christ and friends of everyone, children, young people, adults and elderly, who need the presence and actions of faithful, friendly, prayerful and helpful young people.”

Christianity, an ever-young faith

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Ciprian Olinici, Secretary of State for Religious Affairs, spoke about the eternal young age of Christianity. “We are here under the dome of the most active and involved institution in Romanian civil society, the Orthodox Church,” said the government’s representative.

“We are under the dome of Christianity, an ever-young faith that has inspired and shaped the European spirit in its freshness and authenticity.”

“The message of the Christian Church has always looked at young people with trust and sincerity, with conviction and clarity, with openness and realism, and did so because that is how the Founder and Lord of the Christian Church, the Saviour Jesus Christ, also looked at them,” the Secretary of State added.

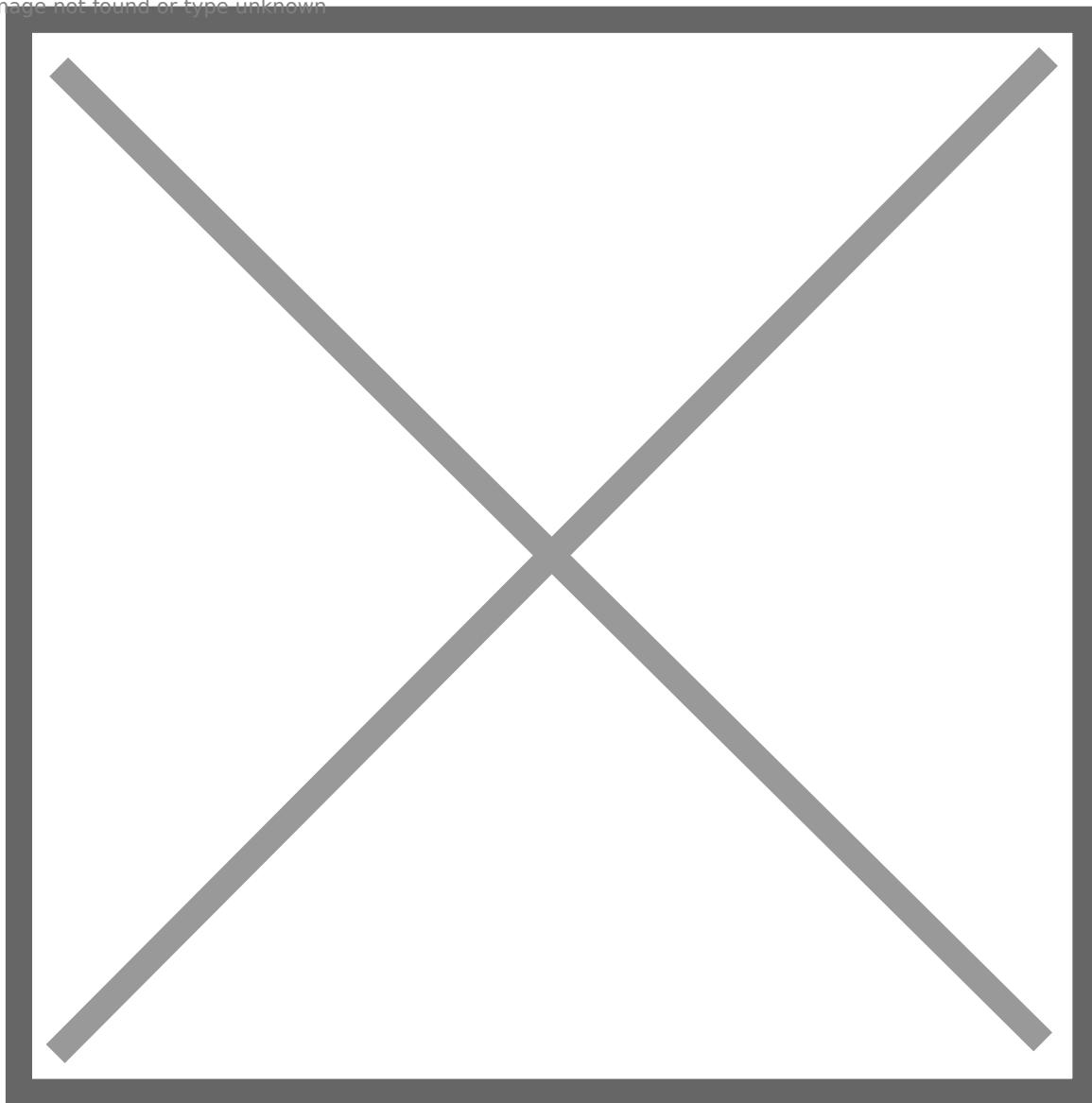
Our Chance: Through Education and Faith

“There’s no point in having mobile phones, talking to anyone from anywhere, if we feel increasingly lonely. We all talk, and no one listens. We are deeply engaged in sterile debates about uninteresting things and are drifting away from what is perhaps most important to us. We seem to have fewer and fewer holy things in the world,” said the Government Representative in the territory, Prefect Mihai Ritivoiu.

“The Church has the great role of keeping us on the right path, as it has done for thousands of years. Here we find the sacred landmarks, the common values that can save us,” he added.

“When you surround yourself with friends who share your commitment to an ethical life, you create a support system that guides you to make positive choices,” said Alin Nica, President of Timis County Council.

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“I particularly appreciate the organisation, within this event, of the special conference dedicated to human trafficking and drug abuse, two topical and serious issues of contemporary society, which concern young people and can only be solved through joint efforts.”

Mayor Dominic Fritz thanked Patriarch Daniel for his vision and the ITO team’s tenacity and effort.

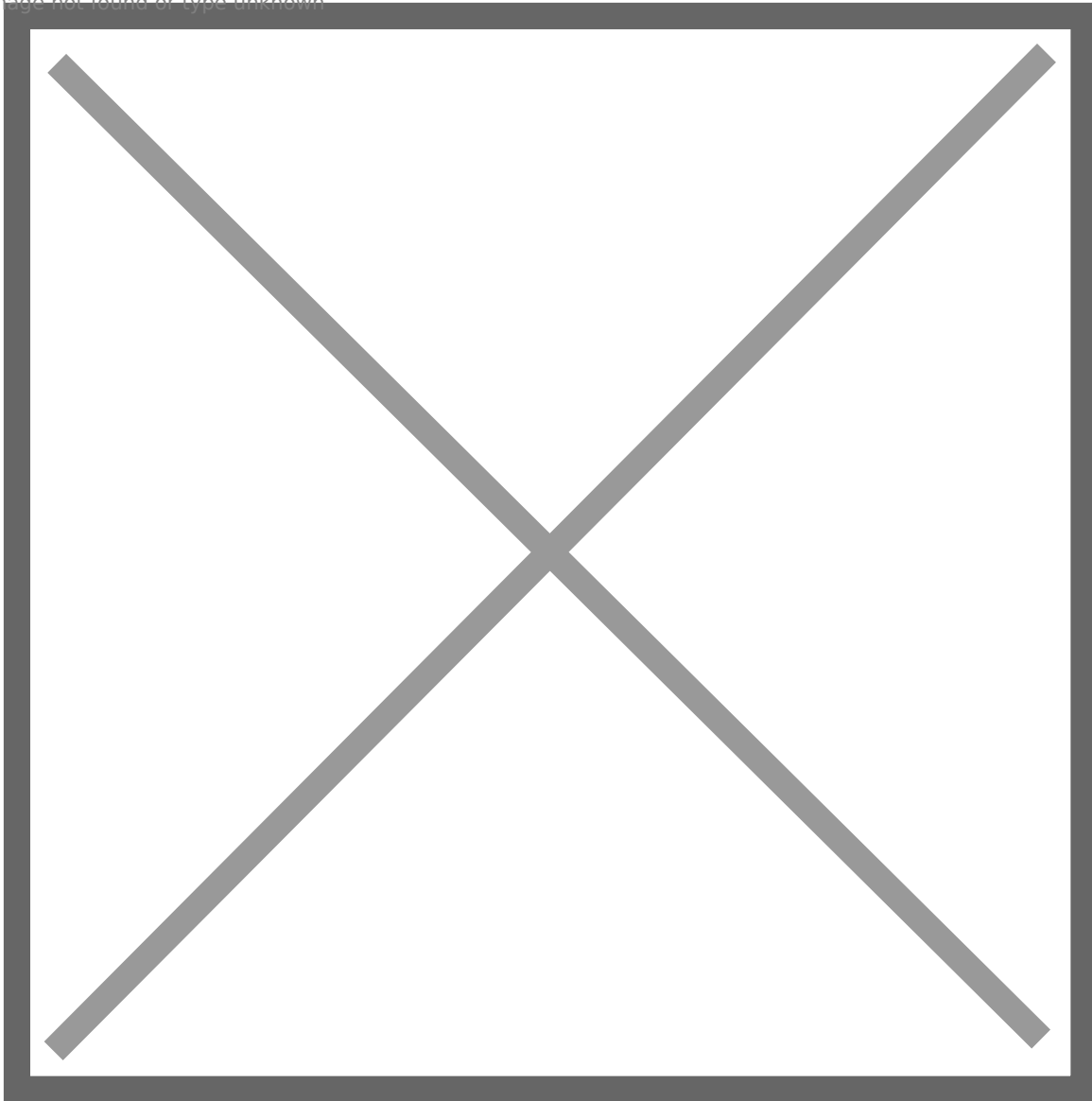
The organisation of this international meeting of Orthodox youth “strengthens Timisoara’s tradition as a multicultural and interfaith city. You inspire us by being here, and I hope that Timisoara and our European story will inspire you too”, he said.

“This beautiful Timișoara that I am sure you have heard about, where we get along with each other regardless of our differences, religion or ethnicity, was built not by

supermen, not by heroes, but by people like each of you,” the Mayor of Timișoara added.

“A better community, dear young people, is the responsibility of each of us. We cannot delegate it to someone else. We cannot delegate it to supermen or heroes. God has gifted us with the talents to build the community and the world we dream of, with humility and joy.”

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“Timisoara is the Kilometer Zero of the rebirth of democracy in Romania, of our freedom. Today, Timisoara represents the Zero Moment of the rebirth of hope, trust, faith and friendship,” Prof. Marilen Pirtea said.

“In the spring of this year, the four universities of Timisoara organised the conference of Romanian science from all over the world, Smart Diaspora Romania,” recalled the rector of the West University of Timisoara.

“At the beginning of autumn, the Orthodox youth of Europe come to Timisoara today to unite their beliefs, ideas and thoughts in this beautiful friendship. On the one hand, science and on the other, faith.”

“This is our chance: through education and faith”, concluded the Timisoara academic.

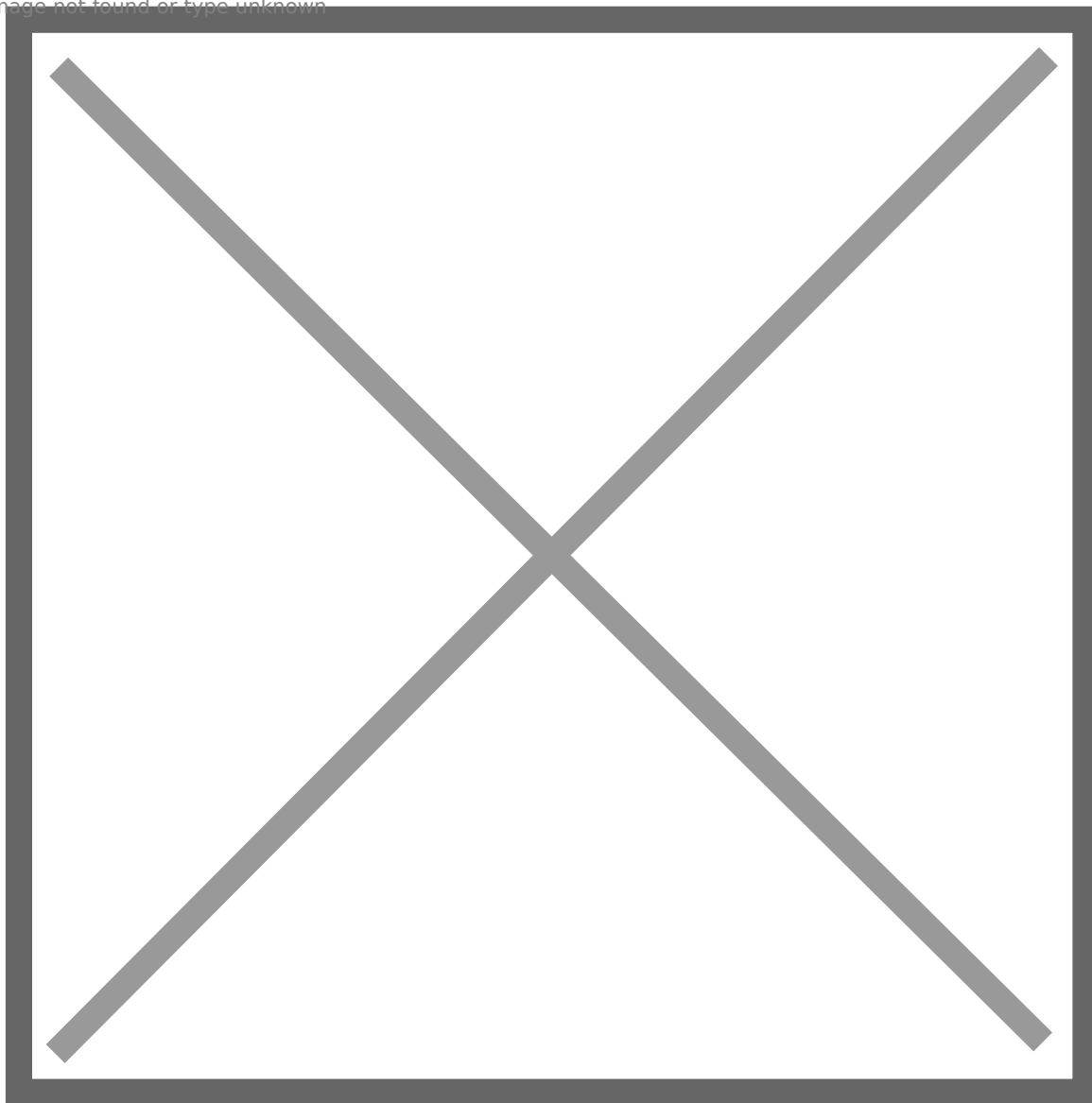
Inaugural show

In the second part of the ceremony, the ITO Anthem was sung, and the ITO Torch was presented, followed by recitals by several artists.

The inaugural ITO 2023 concert was opened by Archimandrite Nikodimos Kabarnos, who sang Byzantine hymns.

Several religious compositions in different languages and from various Christian traditions were performed by the “Solaris” choir, which brings together children from the “Iris” special theoretical high school for the blind and children from the “St. Nicholas” day centre for minors, an institution that reintegrates street children into society.

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The concert continued with a recital of traditional songs presented by the men's choir "Contrast" from Timisoara, comprised of theologians and musicians.

The artistic moments continued with the Fanfare of Coștei from Serbia, a poetry recital in the local Banat dialect and a recital by the Timisoara National Opera Choir.

The 2023 Orthodox Youth Meeting in Timisoara continues in the coming days with lectures on various spiritual, cultural and social themes, workshops and moments of prayer together.

The theme of the current ITO edition is inspired by the words of the Saviour Jesus Christ to his disciples: "You are my friends."

Previous editions have been held annually since 2014. The Timisoara meeting comes after a four-year hiatus due to the pandemic. The next edition will be held in Bucharest.

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