

## **Saint John Chrysostom Clergy Syndesmos of the Archdiocesan District Convened at the Church of Kimisis of the Theotokos Southampton, New York**



The Saint John Chrysostom Clergy Syndesmos of the Archdiocesan District convened at the Church of Kimisis of the Theotokos located in Southampton, New York for a pre-Lenten clergy retreat. As a brotherhood of Faith and mutual support, the local clergy gathered under the omophorion of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, who offered His embrace as His Eminence opened the retreat with remarks and prayerful encouragement. Featured speakers at the retreat included Hank Hanegraaff, known as the Bible Answer Man, and Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides, the Director of the Office of Vocation and Ministry (OVM) at Hellenic College Holy Cross (HCHC). Both speakers brought unique perspectives and insights aimed at enriching the spiritual and pastoral capacities of the attending clergy, setting a tone of reflective contemplation and forward-thinking as the Lenten season approaches.

Hank Hanegraaff's contributions to the retreat centered around the vision of "the century of Orthodoxy," with a focus on enriching the understanding and making more available the practice of the Orthodox faith among clergy and their congregations. In his first talk, "The Paradisiacal Transformation of the Cosmos," Mr. Hanegraaff emphasized the transformative power of a "lived Orthodox Faith" and encouraged the clergy to promote awareness of the Paradise that can be lived now through participation in a Sacramental and Eucharistic life. He poignantly remarked, "through the Cross, Christ offers us the Tree of Life, today," highlighting the immediate and accessible nature of divine grace. His second presentation, "The Photian Vision," called for a mission-minded approach, urging clergy with the words, "We need to open our doors," to actively engage the world with the message and life of Orthodoxy rather than withdrawing from it.

Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides spoke on the impactful work of the CrossRoad Institute, particularly highlighting the CrossRoad Summer Institute for Teens. Her presentation not only showcased the transformative experiences of CrossRoad alumni but also delved into the urgent issues facing contemporary Orthodox

communities, such as evolving parenting needs, engaging with young adults, and innovating active ministry approaches within the parish setting. As the retreat drew to a close, the clergy were afforded the opportunity to engage in collegial fellowship, reflecting on the insights shared by the speakers. This gathering provided not just an occasion for spiritual renewal as Lent begins but also a platform for clergy to discuss practical applications of their faith in ministry, thereby enriching their communal and pastoral work with renewed vision and vigor.

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