



FINAL EDITION: NEWS FROM YOUR COMMUNITY AND YOUR STATE

92-year-old retired pastor starting Greek Orthodox Church in Ocala

By MARK HARPER
STAFF WRITER

SOUTH DAYTONA — The Greek Orthodox church in America began ordaining its own ministers in 1942.

Since then, more than 500 parishes have sprung up, serving 1.5 million people with some 800 priests. The Rev. George Papadeas should know.

He was the first.

On Saturday, Papadeas — who lives in South Daytona — turned 92. Today, just as every Sunday, he plans to drive himself to Ocala to perform services at his latest project, a mission where he's trying to build yet another Greek Orthodox church.

"He's like the Energizer Bunny. He's really amazing," said Irene Koutouzis, who chairs the church council of St. Demetrios Church in Daytona Beach, where Papadeas served as pastor until "retiring" in 1983. The two started the popular Greek Festival held in Daytona Beach each November.

As he stepped away from St. Demetrios, Papadeas had already become involved in helping establish what would become Archangel Michael Greek Orthodox Church in Lecanto. And now, he's doing the same in Ocala.

"My life has been so blessed," Papadeas said in an hourlong interview at his daughter, An-



News-Journal/DAVID TUCKER

The Rev. George Papadeas is the first Greek Orthodox minister ordained in the United States.

gela's, home in South Daytona last week. "If we believe in divine grace, God comes to people with open hearts.

"For 68 years, I've been serving the church continuously. I have friendships that are very strong. I have people who are calling me who I had as pupils in 1942 . . . They call me and it rejuvenates me . . . I'm very wealthy

in my soul."

Papadeas, who remains sharp enough to continue writing and translating Greek church services into English, possesses a mind rich with the history of the Greek Orthodox Church,

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Did You Know?

The Orthodox Church was originally part of the Catholic Church.

- The Great Schism of 1054 split the two into the Roman (Western) Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose "spiritual pre-eminence" was based in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey).
- The Eastern Orthodox Church is organized by nations: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, etc.
- Orthodox churches tend to appeal to the senses, with chanting, incense and ornate art. "One becomes aware of God's presence through the senses," reads an explanation on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America's website.
- The American Greek Orthodox church is headquartered in New York. While Greek Orthodox communities were established in New Orleans and St. Augustine in the 18th century, the first permanent community was founded in New York in 1892.

SOURCES: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Encyclopedia Britannica



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particularly in the United States.

His life is intertwined with it. Born in 1918 in Altoona, Pa., Papadeas is the son of a confectionery owner, the grandson of an immigrant who — after making his fortune — returned to Greece and bought a farm, planting 1,000 orange trees. The later generations, though, stayed stateside.

After graduating from high school in 1937, Papadeas helped organize the first American seminary in Connecticut. He served a stint as a teacher and deacon, and in 1950, was assigned to start the first Greek Orthodox Church on Long Island, N.Y., St. Paul's in Hempstead. It grew with the suburbs it served.

And it was there in the spring of 1960 that Papadeas found himself in the middle of a mystery and a media sensation — the weeping Madonnas.

Peter and Pagona Catsounis reported real tears coming from the eyes of a lithograph of Mary, the "Mother of Sorrows." When Papadeas, their pastor, first learned of it, neighbors were already crowding the apartment to see for themselves.

He went to the family shrine and saw a tear forming in the tear duct of the picture, then rolling down the Madonna's cheek.

"I don't know how you explain this," he said. "You don't explain — you believe it."

Papadeas wrote a book about the icons in 2000, "Why Did She Cry?" In it, he recounts looking at the Catsounis family and others; "they all reflected an unusual aura of serenity, peace and humility."

Papadeas believed.



Images from the book "Why Did She Cry"

Archbishop Iakovos, right, takes a closer look at the icon of the "Mother of Sorrows" along with the Rev. George Papadeas, left, and Pagona Catsounis. The book's cover is shown below.

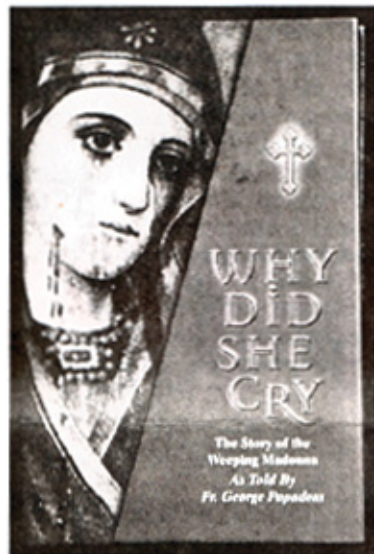
He brought the icon to St. Paul's, where he estimated 300,000 or more people would come to view it and two others, including reporters from the New York newspapers.

Three weeks later, Antonia Koulis reported a similar occurrence with her icon. It was examined by journalists and scientists, yet the mystery was never explained. And a few weeks later, another icon Koulis owned formed tears.

"How can anyone not believe, when it comes to God's will and expression? When through 'Divine Signs,' the laws of nature are challenged and overcome?" Papadeas writes.

That is the faith that keeps Papadeas going, even now at 92. His wife of 62 years, Bess, died in 2004, but he remains close to all five of his children, and has survived a serious health scare brought on by bronchial asthma.

And he drives every Sunday to Ocala and back — about 160



miles round trip.

"People always ask me, 'How long are you going to do this?'" he said. "Anytime I get in my car to Ocala, I feel like I'm driving to heaven . . . It's so beautiful. It's heaven-bound."