

# St. Demetrios' Pastor, Fr. George Papadeas, Retiring

By AMY HILL

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The impression one has when meeting Father George Papadeas, pastor of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Daytona Beach, is that he is a man who embodies the best of human qualities. He is both a capable leader and a compassionate priest, purposeful yet patient, self-assured but humble.

An outsider attending St. Demetrios Church is told by members — in as many ways as there are to phrase it — that their pastor is a great man. Some have tears in their eyes as they speak because Father Papadeas is retiring next month. Although he has been with St. Demetrios for only eight of his 41 years as a priest, it will mark the end of an era for the church.

Perhaps it is unfortunate that a man as beloved and contributing as Father Papadeas is retiring while still in his prime. He seems much younger than his 65 years, and there is no hint of weariness in his manner.

Yet Father Papadeas will retire because, as he said, there are other projects — mostly of a religious nature, though he would also like to travel — that he feels he wants to undertake.

"Retirement means different things to different people," he said. "I'm not the rocking chair type — even if I live to be a hundred. I've always been a creative, productive person."

That statement certainly rings true when one considers his accomplishments.

Father Papadeas was ordained March 25, 1942, and assigned as assistant at the Greek Cathedral of New York. In 1950 he organized the first Greek Orthodox Church on Long Island. The new church, called St. Paul's, was established in the town of Hempstead. Within seven years a \$1.5 million complex was built, and soon St. Paul's was considered to be one of the five leading Greek Orthodox Churches in the country. Father Papadeas also co-founded



FATHER GEORGE PAPADEAS Believes 'tradition' is important

the Cathedral Day School in New York, which quickly was ranked in the top three percent of schools in the state.

Archbishop Iakovos appointed Fr. Papadeas as dean of the Archdiocesan Greek Cathedral in New York Sept. 1, 1963, and he served in that position until 1970. He "commuted" to Greece for many years; at one point he made 15 trips in 12 months. His efforts were recognized formally in 1964, when he was the first Greek American priest to receive the Gold Cross of the Phoenix from King Constantine of Greece.

In 1970 Father Papadeas pioneered a church sponsored summer camp in Greece for Greek American children. Called Ionian Village, the camp gives hundreds of teenagers each year the opportunity to observe Greek customs firsthand.

Acting as a representative of Greek Americans, Father Papadeas was in-

involved in numerous projects in Greece in addition to Ionian Village. While in Greece, he organized the first Eastern Orthodox parish at the USAF Base in Athens, where he served from 1971 to 1975. While in Greece, Father Papadeas requested a transfer to Florida because, he said, he and his family had always wanted to live here. In 1975 that request was granted, and subsequently he was assigned to St. Demetrios Church in Daytona Beach, founded in 1952.

In addition to being a pastor and an administrator, Father Papadeas is an outstanding writer and translator. He has compiled and translated into English the complete Holy Week-Easter Services, the only book of its kind in the Orthodox Church; published a Greek-English edition of the Divine Liturgy and the Akathist Hymnal; written a book in Greek about the life of St. Paul; and compiled a complete series of Sunday school books for the Hempstead, N.Y., parish. The series was so well received that it is used worldwide by the Orthodox Church.

One of Father Papadeas' main objectives after retirement will be to research and write a book on the manifestation of the three icons, or the "miracle of the weeping madonna," a widely recognized religious event which occurred in March, 1960, on Long Island.

Father Papadeas said as a young boy he longed to be a priest and never imagined being in any other profession. Born in Altoona, Pa., he was graduated from Altoona High School and in 1937 enrolled in the charter class of the newly founded Greek Theological Seminary, Pomfret Center, Conn.

Before the founding of the seminary in that year, Greek Orthodox priests were brought to the United States from

Greece. Thus, upon graduation, Father Papadeas was one of the very first American born Greek Orthodox priests.

"Tradition" and "sense of community" are words frequently used by Father Papadeas. He referred to the Greek Festival, an annual event which last year drew attracted 15,000 people as an example of the spirit of the Greek community.

"Greeks are very family oriented," he continued. "We are a closely knit people, though we are Americans first here, then Greeks. Many of the Greek children here are learning to speak and read Greek; they have a sense of tradition, and along with that, traditional values. . . Most kids today get into trouble because nobody guides them.

"I feel badly for this country," he said. "We've developed into a traditionless society."

"I tell couples before I marry them, 'don't sacrifice yourself and your values for what you see around you.' I try to tell them that you simply can't do away with eternal values, or you have nothing," he said.

"What people don't understand is that democracy has its boundaries and its walls. It involves serious responsibility.

To many people, living in a democracy means 'I can do what I want,' and that is the wrong attitude. We don't need to redefine democracy, but to explain it to people."

"People have learned to 'freeload'; they won't work hard. They won't give of themselves," he said.

Nevertheless, Father Papadeas continually stressed that he feels optimistic about the future. "It might take a long time," he said, "but I think things are going to get better. People are tired of things as they are now. I think we'll see more people who want to return to traditional values."

On dealing with the pressures of his work, he said: "I hear about the demands placed on priests and ministers, and that some have trouble with being

overworked. . . But it's never gotten me down. I think you have to learn to circumvent crises. A lot of people make themselves miserable because they don't have an inner source that makes them strong."

Father Papadeas credits his wife of 41 years, Bess, with making his life-work possible. "If she had been the least bit selfish, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish what I have," he said. The couple have five children, three of whom live in the Daytona Beach area, and also five grandchildren.

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