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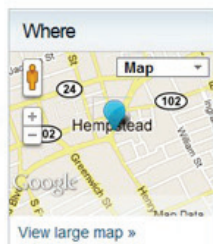
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Greek Orthodox priest George Papadeas dies

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By BART JONES bart.jones@newsday.com



An undated photo of father George Papadeas, a Daytona Beach Greek Orthodox pastor, who died.



Up until a few months ago, Father George Papadeas, the longest continuous-serving Greek Orthodox priest in the United States with 69 years of service, would drive himself each weekend 95 miles -- one way -- to a parish in Florida to conduct religious services.

Papadeas, who in 1950 founded St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church in Hempstead, one of the largest Greek Orthodox churches in the United States, died Nov. 18 in Daytona Beach, Fla., at 93.

He was a towering figure in the Greek Orthodox Church, bringing its first parish to Long Island, ministering to thousands of people, accumulating scores of awards -- and even overseeing an episode in 1960 in which a lithograph of a Madonna owned by one of his parishioners in Island Park was said to have wepted, attracting thousands of the faithful.

"He was a real rock," said one of his sons, Timothy Papadeas, 52, of Daytona Beach. "So many people went to him for so many things."

Stavros Papagermanos, a spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, based in Manhattan, said Papadeas was "a very active priest and a very well-respected priest" who served longer than any other priest in the Greek Orthodox Church in this country.

The son of Greek immigrants, Papadeas grew up in Altoona, Pa., and knew from an early age he wanted to be a priest, his son said. One day when he was 6, he went missing from the family's house -- and his parents found him walking to the local church, Timothy Papadeas said.

He eventually went on to the seminary, was ordained in 1942 and then spent several years working in Manhattan. By 1950, the archdiocese dispatched him to Long Island to start the area's first Greek Orthodox church.

He founded St. Paul's that year on Greenwich Avenue in Hempstead, and less than a decade later moved it to larger quarters on Cathedral Avenue. In 1960, the church drew national attention with the weeping Madonna.

He left Long Island in 1963, and went on to other assignments including one in Greece, where he ran a camp for Greek-American children sent there from the United States to learn about their religious roots.

By 1975, Papadeas moved to Daytona Beach, and founded several Greek Orthodox churches in Florida. In recent years he regularly made the 95-mile drive to Ocala and never complained. "When I'm driving to church, it's like I'm driving to heaven," he would tell his family.

He received numerous awards for his work, including the Order of the Phoenix medal from the king of Greece. But Papadeas never took the honors too seriously -- he kept most piled in a corner in a room in his house, his son said.

Papadeas also is survived by sons Elias, Dean and Paul Papadeas, all of Daytona Beach; a daughter, Angela Sabato, also of Daytona Beach; nine grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

His funeral is scheduled for Tuesday at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church in Daytona Beach.

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