

Ocala Orthodox church to honor late Rev. Papadeas on Sunday

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For nearly 10 years, the small Pan-Orthodox Community of Greater Ocala labored to make a dream a reality.

Church members cooked meals and sweets for the annual Greek Festival, meals for dinner dances and treats for a social hour after Sunday liturgy, all as fundraisers to build a church.

The Rev. George Papadeas walked and dined and worshiped with his flock every step of the way, driving 160 miles round trip to Ocala from his home in Daytona Beach several times a week.

The congregation finally broke ground on the new St. Mark's Greek Orthodox Church in Belleview on Feb. 21, 2010. The existing fellowship hall and chapel is named the Father George Papadeas Community Center, and there are plans to build a church next to the center.

Papadeas died on Nov. 18, 2011, at age 93. Members of the congregation will honor his leadership and friendship with what is termed a "40-day memorial" beginning on Sunday at the chapel. A mercy dinner will be served, and all are welcome to attend. Donations will be used for the building fund for the proposed church.

Also, the annual Greek Festival takes place this year from Jan. 27 through Jan. 29 at the center named in his honor. Proceeds from that event also will aid the building fund.

In 1942, Papadeas became the first American-born Greek Orthodox clergyman



Steve Floethe/Correspondent

Father George Papadeas, left, conducts "Veneration of the Cross" or "Adoration of the Cross" during Sunday Mass at the Greek Orthodox Mission of Greater Ocala at Trinity Catholic High School Chapel on March 21, 2009. Assisting the Priest is Dr. Carry Pantazis, center, while Jimi Rucker and George Arvanitis serve as Altar Boys.



ordained to the priesthood.

His resume also lists other “firsts,” such as being the first person to translate the Complete Services of Holy Week-Easter from Greek into English, the first to organize an Eastern Orthodox parish on a military base in Athens and the first to organize a Greek festival in Florida, at the St. Demetrios Parish Center in Daytona Beach.

In his mid-80s, he dedicated himself to being part of a successful Greek Orthodox church-building journey in Ocala. During one fundraising dinner dance, when congratulated on the fact that property had been purchased and plans were drawn for a community hall, chapel and church, Papadeas quickly put things into perspective.

“I’ve built churches before. We have to be careful of the sin of pride. This isn’t about us. It is about building a house of worship for God,” he said.

Parishioners said each project to build the church is undertaken with an attitude of fellowship and love laced with laughter, which Papadeas preached, practiced and perpetuated.

“Father always practiced love and understanding,” said Cary Pantazis, president of the church’s parish council. “If anyone was upset, he always addressed it, never let anything fester. He was a visionary, helping us move forward. It was a big gamble, buying property, building a church with only 50 families. Father would say, ‘The Lord will provide.’ ”

For many years before the center was built, the annual Greek Festival took place in the parish hall at Blessed Trinity Catholic Church in Ocala.

“They did all the work, I just provided the hall,” said the Rev. Pat Sheedy, pastor at Blessed Trinity. “Father Papadeas was just a wonderful man; open, zealous, very easy to like. There was not a prejudiced bone in his body. And he was a great church leader. He encouraged the Greek Festival and helped a very united and zealous church community become mighty.”

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