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Father George Papadeas: Daytona Beach pastor was an American first

November 27, 2011 | By Jeff Kunerth, Orlando Sentinel

Just a few days before his death at 93, Father George Papadeas sat on the edge of his bed, eating a Steak 'n Shake hamburger with pepper only, and plotted how he could make it to church on Sunday.

If his oldest son, who owns a Cadillac with a back seat big enough for him the lay down in, picked him up at his house in Daytona Beach for the drive to Ocala, they could put him in a wheelchair and he'd be able to attend the Greek Orthodox church he helped found in 2004.



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"He was that type of visionary to the very end," said his son Timothy Papadeas, 52, of Daytona Beach. "His retirement would last a week and then he'd start another church. Retire again and start another church."

The elder Papadeas never made it to church that Sunday. He died Nov. 18 of congestive heart failure.

The son of Greek immigrants, George Papadeas became the first American-born clergyman ordained by the Greek Orthodox Church in 1945. Prior to that, the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States imported their priests from abroad.

Papadeas would end up as the longest serving Greek Orthodox priest in the United States with 69 continuous years of service. In the 1950s, he devised a typewriter keyboard for Smith Corona that used Greek letters. In the 1960s, he founded the St. Paul's Cathedral in Long Island that became one of the largest Greek Orthodox cathedrals in the nation.

"His pride was the church he built on Long Island," his son said. "We all have sweet spots in our lives. That had to be one of his."

After moving to Daytona Beach in 1975, Papadeas served as pastor of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church to 1983. He helped start Daytona Beach's Greek festival and founded two Greek Orthodox churches in the Inverness and Ocala areas.

Papadeas was a strong man in body and spirit. He helped build many of the churches he founded, but also laid the foundations for playhouses, patios and benches in his own back yard.

If he watched television, it was the news. And if he was watching the news, he was reading the newspaper at the same time. He liked good, simple food, such as meat cooked well-done and mashed potatoes. The two bedrooms he converted into offices in his modest four-bedroom house were filled with papers and religious books. In the corner of one, he stacked all his plaques and awards.

He rarely went to the movies. His son recalls taking his parents to see *Titanic*. Father Papadeas was impressed with the spectacle, but was in no hurry to see another film.

Sitting still was not his natural state of being. He had to be doing something, somewhere, all the time to make things better for the people he knew, the congregations he ministered to, and the world in which he lived.

One of his home offices contained boxes upon boxes of Christmas cards he received over the years. They were sent to him not just to acknowledge the day, but to thank the man. Many had personal, handwritten words of appreciation for a humble priest who made an impact on those around him and the church he loved.

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"He really loved what he did," Timothy Papadeas said. "When we love what we do and God blesses you with talent, a lot can be accomplished."

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

Haigh-Black Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Ormond Beach, is handling arrangements.

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