



## The Rev. George Papadeas: Greek church founder

### Postscript

By Nancy Kennedy

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LECANTO — To the members and friends of Archangel Michael Greek Orthodox Church in Lecanto, their founding pastor, the Rev. George Papadeas, was a “priest of priests.”

“If it wasn’t for Father George, St. Michael’s wouldn’t be in Lecanto — and I wouldn’t be here,” said church member George Kanaris. “He married my parents 63 or 64 years ago in Brooklyn, N.Y., so he’s been an important part of my family.” Papadeas died Nov. 18 in Daytona Beach at age 93.

Kanaris said the congregation started meeting in a duplex on Ella Street in Inverness in 1981, then moved to a storefront in Lecanto. When the members wanted to build their own building, they held their first fundraising meeting at Emily’s, Kanaris’ restaurant in Homosassa, where Papadeas pledged the first \$5,000.

“He was a tremendous fundraiser,” Kanaris said. “He had vision. It was his idea to build a banquet hall and his idea for the Greek festivals. More than that, he was truly a holy man. He was charismatic and had a sense of peace about him that drew people.”

Born in Altoona, Pa., to Greek immigrants, Papadeas was part of the first group of priests to graduate from the nation’s first Greek seminary. Prior to that, Greek Orthodox priests were imported from Greece to serve churches in the United States.

Papadeas founded St. Paul’s Cathedral in Hempstead, N.Y., in the late 1950s and even helped construct the altar. Later he founded St. Michael’s in Lecanto and the Ocala Mission in Ocala. While serving the Lecanto church as its priest, he also served St. Demetrios parish in Daytona Beach, traveling every other week to Lecanto from his home in Daytona.

Even after he retired from St. Michael’s in 1997, he commuted to Ocala until just a few months ago when his health began to fail.

“When we were coming down here from Michigan, after we were introduced to Father George in 1995, we used to plan our trips around church services, when we met only twice a month,” said Sylvia Lovelace, St. Michael’s choir director. “He was inspirational as a preacher, but he was also a wonderful teacher. He taught not only about salvation, but about history. He was good at what he did.” In the late 1950s, Papadeas designed a keyboard layout for Greek language typewriters to make it easier for American typists and gave the idea to Smith-Corona.

In 1960, he brought a “weeping” icon of the Virgin Mary to St. Paul’s, which drew hundreds of thousands to see the miraculous manifestation. In 1990, New York Newsday named it one of the most significant events of the past 50 years. When Richard Nixon was vice president, he invited Papadeas to the White House to tell him about the icon and its tears, which he wrote about in his book, “Why Did She Cry?”

Among many of his accomplishments, Papadeas went on to become the dean of the Archdiocesan Cathedral in New York City. He wrote and spoke Greek fluently. He raised five children and was spiritual father to thousands.

“In our early years, he was our rock,” said George Mavros, longtime church member and spokesman. “When we were trying to form a community out of nothing, he offered hope. Clearly, without him we would not be a congregation. He was dedicated and always put the church first. He was not only a spiritual father, but a friend. Even though he never lived here, he kept in constant contact and communication.”

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