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92-year-old retired pastor starting Greek Orthodox Church in Ocala

By MARK HARPER
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SOUTH DAYTONA — The Greek Orthodox church in America began ordaining its own ministers in 1942.

Since then, more than 500 parishes have sprung up, serving 1.5 million people with some 800 priests. The Rev. George Papadeas should know.

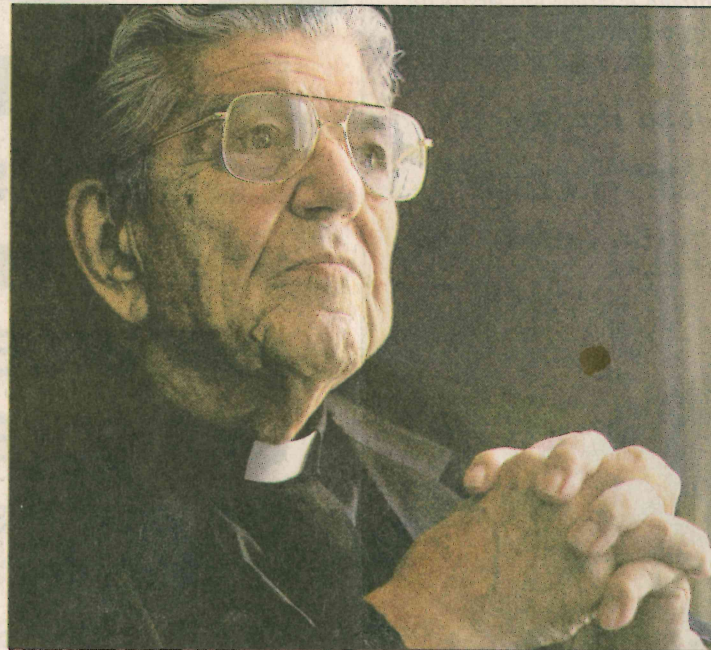
He was the first.

On Saturday, Papadeas — who lives in South Daytona — turned 92. Today, just as every Sunday, he plans to drive himself to Ocala to perform services at his latest project, a mission where he's trying to build yet another Greek Orthodox church.

"He's like the Energizer Bunny. He's really amazing," said Irene Koutouzis, who chairs the church council of St. Demetrios Church in Daytona Beach, where Papadeas served as pastor until "retiring" in 1983. The two started the popular Greek Festival held in Daytona Beach each November.

As he stepped away from St. Demetrios, Papadeas had already become involved in helping establish what would become Archangel Michael Greek Orthodox Church in Lecanto. And now, he's doing the same in Ocala.

"My life has been so blessed," Papadeas said in an hourlong interview at his daughter, An-



News-Journal/DAVID TUCKER

The Rev. George Papadeas is the first Greek Orthodox minister ordained in the United States.

gela's, home in South Daytona last week. "If we believe in divine grace, God comes to people with open hearts.

"For 68 years, I've been serving the church continuously. I have friendships that are very strong. I have people who are calling me who I had as pupils in 1942 . . . They call me and it rejuvenates me . . . I'm very wealthy

in my soul."

Papadeas, who remains sharp enough to continue writing and translating Greek church services into English, possesses a mind rich with the history of the Greek Orthodox Church,

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Did You Know?

The Orthodox Church was originally part of the Catholic Church.

■ The Great Schism of 1054 split the two into the Roman (Western) Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, whose "spiritual pre-eminence" was based in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey).

■ The Eastern Orthodox Church is organized by nations: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, etc.

■ Orthodox churches tend to appeal to the senses, with chanting, incense and ornate art. "One becomes aware of God's presence through the senses," reads an explanation on the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America's website.

■ The American Greek Orthodox church is headquartered in New York. While Greek Orthodox communities were established in New Orleans and St. Augustine in the 18th century, the first permanent community was founded in New York in 1892.

SOURCES: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Encyclopedia Britannica