

## ST. DEMETRIOS PARISH GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Every anniversary constitutes a milestone. It affords us an opportunity to look forward and to plan for the future, but also it is an opportunity to register events in the past, which constitute a veritable history. For posterity I bring to mind, and for everyone's knowledge, the main Events of my eight and on half years' service to our beloved St. Demetrios Parish, which are indeed a segment of our Parish history.



### ***A. My previous service prior to my assignment to St. Demetrios.***

I had the privilege of being assigned as Pastor of St. Demetrios here in Daytona Beach on April 1, 1975. My previous service was as the assistant Priest of the Archdiocesan Cathedral under the luminary of our Church, Fr. Basil Efthimiou of blessed memory from 1942, when I had graduated as a Member of the Charter Class of the Theological Seminary in Pomfret Center, Conn., until 1950. In September of that year I was assigned by Archbishop Michael of blessed memory to organize the first Greek Orthodox Parish in the vastness of the 2 sprawling counties on Long Island, which today is the home to 14 major Parishes.

The Good Lord blessed the newly founded St. Paul's Parish in Hempstead, L.I. abundantly, with a large Parish Complex beyond the imagination among the 45 Metropolitan New York Parishes. The growth of the Parish was phenomenal. It opened up new vistas for our Church in America. Through a visionary program, which encompassed all segments of the Parish, innovative programs unknown to our Church in America were initiated, and their implementation brought an electrifying vibrancy that kept the Parish energized. It produced a momentum which has continued over the past 52 years of its existence.

After having served for 13 years in this "miracle" Parish, I was assigned as Dean of the Archdiocesan Cathedral in 1963, although I never wanted to leave Saint Paul's, but the Cathedral situation was such, that it was imperative for me as a soldier of the Church to accept the position for the major job of reconstruction.

In 1970 I was assigned by Archbishop Iakovos as the Organizer and Director of the Ionian Village summer Camp on the shores of the Ionian Sea which was to offer our Greek American Youth a well rounded religious, educational, cultural and social program. I was also to be the representative of Archbishop Iakovos to the Church of Greece and to the Greek Government. The camping program was highly successful and continues to the present day on the foundations laid in 1970.

### ***B. My assignment to St. Demetrios.***

Upon my return from Greece, Archbishop Iakovos was preparing my appointment to the St. Andrew's Parish in Chicago. For 35 years I had accepted all assignments without hesitation, and now at 55 years of age I respectfully made my first request ever to serve any Parish in Florida. He answered that there was only one opening, Daytona Beach, and that he felt this Parish was too small in numbers. Nonetheless I insisted, and on April, 1975 I assumed my duties here.

Returning from Greece, both Presvytera and I wondered what it would be like to serve a smaller Parish, after serving 30 years in the cosmopolitan and well populated Metropolitan New York area. But, there were no apprehensions. We would take it as it came, as we always had. I had no doubts, that we could add something, even to this small Parish from our decades of experience, and Moreno felt confident, that using the full measure of our Lord's love, as I had always applied in my ministry,



success would be assured, and the Parish would be blessed. The Lord's blessing of love had worked successfully in New York and in Greece, why would it be any different in Daytona?

When I arrived, Michael J. Forest, the Treasurer, opened the Church for me to see the interior and his first words were: "Father, you have a tough nut to crack because of the deficit and the first payment on our large Mortgage." That was due to the fact that he and the late Theodore Kypreos were going to sign a note of guarantee at the Bank to get a loan of \$15,000, which was to include my \$1,000 per month salary! My response was, "Don't worry Mike. All things will ultimately work out for the common good." And so they did. The Parish was to respond splendidly.

However, I was surprised to witness a rooted division in the Community. On the one hand it was the "Islanders" as the Greek Canadians referred to the established locals. On the other hand it was the Greek Canadians, who had come to settle in Daytona having opened successful businesses, much to the credit of our people. I was deeply concerned with what I estimated as a rather superficial situation, but which would root if some action would not have been taken on my part. I had concluded that it was simply a matter of some prejudice. But it was troubling to witness that there was almost no contact between the groups. How was I to deal with it for their own benefit and that of the Parish? I had to find a way to have them get to know one another.

### *C. The Greek Festival is born!*

One morning I called an informal open forum of the St. Demetrios family to discuss the possibility of organizing a Festival. I made no mention of the reason for same, but simply stressed that we needed the funds to function and promote the Parish. The response I received was, that an undertaking of a Festival was beyond comprehension for St. Demetrios. However, I was very insistent, and listening to my insistence Mike Forest said, Father, I see that you are adamant regarding the organizing of a Festival; there is only one way it can come to pass and that is, if you accept to be the general organizer and overseer." That's the way it happened. All systems were "go." We held our First Greek Festival during the first week-end of December, 1975. It met with unbelievable success, and became the model for all the subsequent Annual Festivals. I bless and will always remember the scores of volunteers and my first assistant, Presvytera Bess, who did an excellent job with the Ladies in the Pastry Department.

It was not an easy task, especially when there were absolutely no available funds for advertising in the newspaper, radio, etc. I was so concerned as to how we were going to spread the message to our fellow Americans whom we would be inviting to our First Festival. After much thought an idea struck me. It gave substance to the adage: "nothing ventured, nothing gained." I went to LAMAR advertising and saw Mr. Keating, who was receptive to my request to contribute some space on their billboards. He said he would give us 10 strategic locations, providing we provide the cost of the paper for the billboards. When he mentioned only \$30 to defray the paper cost of each billboard I surely didn't hesitate to give the okay. Two months before the Festival on all the main roads there we saw the established logo of the 3 Dancers and particulars of our Festival vividly portrayed on those billboards. It really was a thrill to see these and it brought great pride to our, limited in numbers, Parish. Without these billboards we could never have had the crowds we welcomed. Thus, our First Festival, organized on a shoestring as the saying goes, met with unbelievable success.

I mention here an idea brought forth to tie in with the Olympic Games, which hit the newspapers and our TV station as a newsworthy item. It was the Olympic Torch run. This was exclusively a GOYA project to officially declare the opening of the Festival.

A large stainless steel bowl had been placed at the entrance of our Parish Center, high above the heads of the people. Into it we had poured flammable material. The GOYANS were to run in relay fashion the 2 mile distance of the City Hall steps to the Parish Center. On the City Hall steps the Hon. Mayor Lawrence Kelly ignited the torch and the first runner was off. Every two blocks the torch was relayed to fellow GOYANS. All along the road, escorted by motorcycle Patrolmen, our GOYANS made the run in view of a couple thousand people.



When the last runner approached the Parish Center entrance he lit the flammable material and thus the signal was given for the formal opening of the Festival. Yes, the Festival met with unbelievable success, but, my prayer-based effort met with even greater success than the Festival. This was ultra important for me. My chief objective of the Festival had been achieved with the St. Demetrios Family coming together in complete harmony and unity. The flimsy wall of separation quickly leveled. I felt the power of this unity very strongly. It was very evident. My prayers of gratitude abounded to God for having blessed us so.

***D. Our Festival gives "birth" to our beautiful and most functional Patio.***

Judging by the success of our first Festival I was deeply concerned about enlarging our facility. But how? The Community was just beginning to get on its feet economically, and naturally we could never even think of committing to the gigantic expenditure of paving and beautifying the slope between our Parish Center and the river. But the question remained. How were we to accommodate the multitudes of future Festival goers without additional space? I mentioned this to Mr. Anargyros Xepapas A.I.A., at the first Festival. He had as his guest the U.S. Senator Stone and one could see how enthusiastic they both were with this truly great Family Party. Mr. Xepapas was very receptive. Without hesitation, he told me that he would be sending the Foreman of his construction crew who would draw up the plans as I had envisioned them. It happened so quickly. I had concrete ideas of how the patio should look, and the "miracle" happened to accommodate all future Festivals. Without this patio we could never have accommodated the crowds at the subsequent Festivals.

***E. Our St. Demetrios Church is consecrated.***

Two years later, October 16, 1977, Archbishop Iakovos came to consecrate our Church. He marveled at the unity he witnessed. Enthusiasm was rampant. His Eminence was pleasantly surprised to witness the standing room only attendance in the Church. He was equally surprised to see the 450 people who sat at the Banquet in our beautifully transformed Hall into a Garden of Eden by the many 12 foot palm trees and lush floral decorations donated by Mr. & Mrs. Anargyros Xepapas. His Eminence, inspired by the exuberant spirit of our people, and knowing that we had shouldered a tremendous Mortgage, called on the people to respond in kind. Without any problem over \$89,000 was raised that night at the spirited banquet. This amount, coupled with added proceeds of \$28,500 from the beautifully bound historical Journal published for the Affair, greatly alleviated the reduction of our Mortgage costs.

***F. The New Smyrna Memorial.***

It was a very pleasant surprise for me at the first Liturgy I had celebrated at St. Demetrios to see the late Mr. & Mrs. Louis D. Harris in the Congregation. They were vibrant Members of St. Paul's in Hempstead until they moved to Florida. I hadn't known then to which city they had moved. I was elated, and since that first Sunday Mr. Harris would come almost daily to help me in the office since we had no secretary. Mr. Harris was a stalwart 50 year Member of the AHEPA. He informed me of the memorial plaque in New Smyrna, dedicated to the first 500 Greeks who arrived on the shores of Mosquito Inlet, renamed New Smyrna in 1768. I confess I had no knowledge of this historic event. He told me that a bronze plaque was dedicated by the AHEPA in 1968, during a grandiose ceremony with Governor Kirk, Metropolitan Germanos Polyzoides and the AHEPA dignitaries present. Seven years had elapsed and nothing had been done. I just couldn't fathom why an annual commemoration was not held, which over the years could have gained national prominence. It was an opportunity lost.

I tried to imagine the dire conditions under which those 500 pioneers were forced to live, I



considered it our debt to commence holding an Annual Memorial Service before the bronze plaque. The first annual service was on Memorial Day 1975. It met with great success with almost 100 present.

Since the local AHEPA chapter had disbanded years before I came to Daytona, I thought it proper to write to the AHEPA Headquarters announcing the organizing of this event, and ask them to possibly send a representative. Commending my initiative to make this an annual event, the AHEPA headquarters sent as their representative Mr. Economou from Vero Beach.

The keynote speaker was the late U.S. Congressman William Chappell, whose dynamic speech touched all those present. Participating also were Fr. Nicholas Geotes, my predecessor of blessed memory, and Fr. Michael Kontogiorgis of Orlando. A successful Luncheon was held at the Restaurant of Mr. & Mrs. George Kaniaris. Thus, the tradition was established and each year a Memorial was held.

With the late Louis Harris we often spoke of the close ties of the AHEPA Chapter and our St. Paul's Church in Hempstead. One day he asked me if it would be alright for him to try to revive the Chapter here in Daytona. I replied, by all means and that I would help him in any way possible. He met with a certain apathy, but he persevered and the Chapter was re-organized with him as the temporary Chairman. The rest is history. The magnificent Monument to the first settlers came as a result of these Memorials. Who cannot but be moved, when he or she is at the monument, artistically designed and executed by Mr. Anarygyros Xepapas A.I.A., in a beautiful park setting facing the Atlantic Ocean. It is a credit to the AHEPA and to the Chairman Mr. Dino Rizopoulos and his Committee to have transformed the dream into reality.

#### ***G. Our Philoptochos, our Greek School, our Sunday School and our GOYA.***

The Parish was steadily growing and much activity was evident with various affairs. The spirit of cooperation brought a bountiful harvest to our Philoptochos under the presidency of Mrs. Angeline Constant, by responding to various needs. We also had organized a small golden-age Club giving our seniors an opportunity to partake in many field trips. We were fortunate to organize an afternoon Greek School. Mrs. Louis Stoumbos had volunteered having done an excellent job, during the first year of my service, teaching Greek to our children. She was succeeded by Mr. Nicholas Kontaridis from Orlando, and his teaching brought marvelous results. Our Sunday School was vibrant with about a dozen Teachers. I considered it a vital part of my work to hold the short prayer Service before every Liturgy. Our students had learned the first hymns of the Liturgy and sang them harmoniously.

My sermonette aimed at building the character of our young ones, and would always end by a question and answer period. It was an exhilarating experience. Many parents were in attendance and were thrilled to see their children participate. Our GOYA was always in the forefront in so many ways with their weekly meetings and varied activities. It was such an enriching pleasure to be the Father of the beautiful St. Demetrios Family.

#### ***H. Our Holy Epiphany Celebration.***

I always wanted to go to Tarpon Springs on January 6<sup>th</sup> to participate in the Statewide celebration, but I could not because of our own Service on this great Holy Day, which was always so well attended. A couple of years after my arrival to Daytona I was invited to a picnic at DeLeon Springs, I was positively inspired by the natural surroundings and the purity of the water that continuously springs forth. I thought to myself. Here is a very ideal setting to hold an Epiphany Service for all the East Coast of Florida.

I wrote to Bishop John of Atlanta expressing my desire to hold the Epiphany Service at DeLeon Springs. His reply was negative, stating that only Tarpon Springs by tradition had that privilege. I was very disappointed, but I decided to organize the Epiphany Service anyway. I invited His Grace, now



Metropolitan Methodios to officiate. He graciously accepted. The Priests of Orlando, Jacksonville and Melbourne also participated. It was estimated that about 1000 attended. Our teenagers would be the divers to try and retrieve the Cross tossed into the water by the Metropolitan. After the Service, the Parish tendered a luncheon organized by the late Steno J. Augustine. The Service was shown over the local TV Station as news. All those in attendance were thrilled with such a novel religious expression.

The following year we had as the celebrant Bishop, now Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh. There was a significant increase in numbers during the 2nd Annual Epiphany celebration which was indicative that in a few years it could easily have become a widely recognized Event for all of east central Florida. I was indeed very sorry to see that this beautiful edifying tradition was discontinued.

### *I. Purchasing of houses across from St. Demetrios.*

Our Parish was forever growing. We had to have more space for parking, etc. There was no way to expand either to the south or north of our Parish complex. The only way we could move was across the street. When I saw the first house for sale, I convinced the Parish Council, regardless of the condition of the house to purchase it for future use. Then the adjacent house was for sale. We purchased that also, as we did the two houses that backed up to them on Peninsula Dr. My dream was to buy all the houses down to Auditorium Boulevard and on the property build a Senior Citizen Home, which I knew the Government would finance. Leveling those houses gave us the much needed space for parking and also the lucrative income from the special events like Bike Week, etc.

A couple of years after I retired only because of health reasons, I saw a house for sale but not adjacent to our property. I mentioned this to a prominent Member of the Council that we should purchase any house that was for sale up to Auditorium Boulevard. I was told that there was a house between the house for sale and our property. I couldn't understand the logic. It was an opportunity lost. I do hope that one day we will have purchased all the houses up to Auditorium Boulevard and the Senior Citizens Home will become a reality.

All of the above, while taking up much space in the Commemorative Journal, are very important for our original communicants to know, but also for those who arrived after 1983, when I retired.

In closing, I wish to express my congratulations to all those who worked so hard to promote the 50th Anniversary of our beloved St. Demetrios. I cannot but express my sincere gratitude for the cooperation I received from the Parish Councils, with which I worked so closely over 8 years, as well as all the organizations and the wonderful Members of our Parish who made everything possible. One name though does stand above the others, and I know that those who worked with him will totally agree. It was Theodore Kypreos of blessed memory, whose enthusiasm and drive were to a great degree responsible for the fund raising to build our permanent structures. I worked very closely with Mr. Kypreos, who never resisted any of my ideas or plans, as I also did with Mr. Michael J. Forest, our Treasurer then, and a daily visitor to my office to see if there was anything he could do that was needed for the Church. He was a most delightful neighbor and always responded promptly to any need which arose.

However, my greatest satisfaction came from the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and delivering the Greek and English Sermons before a congregation that filled most of the pews every Sunday and on great Holidays to see standing room only. An added joy was to be present at all the Meetings of our various groups, which made for a tightly knit organization and Community. A grand feeling also were the countless times when I was successful, through the blessing of the Lord, to minister to our people in so many ways; in sickness, in sorrow, in happiness, in achievements.

I thank the Good Lord for having given me the privilege to have been the spiritual Father of a truly blessed Community.