

Memories of Our Priests

Submitted by Michael Forest, a lifelong resident

Our first priest, **Archimandrite Nephon Demetriou**, went to the pulpit wearing the headgear of his clerical position to preach the first sermon we were to hear at St. Demetrios. It was most impressive for someone who had never seen an archimandrite. Nothing would irritate Father more than our not closing the front door of the church when entering for Divine Liturgy. Since we had no air-conditioning, he relied on an exhaust fan above the altar that created a draft for him with the open door. He did not hesitate to stop the liturgy to let us know how he felt. Father Nephon was with us for only a little over a year.

Father John Panos, our second priest, collected \$900.00 from individuals so that he could order two large, heavy candle stands from Greece. They stood on either side of the Royal Doors of the iconostasis at the Cypress Street site. We were concerned when Father had to use the steps to the altar as he was in his late 80's and his footing was not that of a younger individual. He never stumbled nor fell but we were always apprehensive due to his advanced age.

Father John P. Athas was our first American born and youngest priest during the past fifty years. I have a vivid memory of my priest with tears in his eyes after he, my dad and I delivered a basket of food to a very poor family for Thanksgiving Day. The mother stood by her four small children gathered around the kitchen table to examine the food. She began to cry and could only whisper, "Thank you." There was silence in the truck as we drove to our next destination to help another family.

One day I suggesting to Fr. John, who was also an accomplished artist, that he paint the nativity scene on three 4' x 8' fiberglass panels to be installed in Riverfront Park on Beach Street. The panels were set in wood frames stapled with gold foil. With floodlights behind the panels, they resembled stain glass windows. After Father began painting the scenes, I felt guilty for having him perform this extra duty at night. I kept him company until it came time to install them in the park. I felt so much better for his efforts when we were awarded first prize by the Merchants Association. Since Beach Street was our main business district in those days, everyone had the opportunity to view all of the Christmas displays including the one by Saint Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church. The following year, the display was erected in front of our church at the former Batista residence.

I accompanied Father John to Clearwater on many occasions as we loaded the back of his white Oldsmobile station wagon with used candles for credit towards new ones. He liked the company and I enjoyed being with him. It seemed that he was always happy and nothing seemed to annoy him. Those were the days before we had I-4 so we traveled through many towns. The unexpected visits with Greek families was always appreciated and they often insisted that we stay for lunch or dinner. They felt so special that the priest from Daytona was taking time from his busy schedule to say hello.

Upon hearing that I was to go into the Army, Father presented me with a silver keepsake of Christ after church service. I have worn it around my neck for 44 years and it is as bright as the day it was presented to me. On the reverse side of the medal, I proudly proclaim that I am a Greek Orthodox.

His biggest disappointment and frustration was in our not making a decision to build a new church and hall while he was still our priest. Father John accepted a new assignment in Clearwater where a church and community center complex were to be built. We were to use their architect and duplicate their "gold" dome in our church.

We were all so happy to see him along with Presvytera Sophia attend our mortgage burning ceremony at the Hilton Hotel. The hugs and tears, as we exchanged greetings, told the story of love and affection. She was our guest at the 50th Anniversary Celebration. If only Father John could have joined us. He passed away three years ago in Price, Utah.

Father James Karalexis was the priest who was in a procession from the Batista house to the present site of the community center for the groundbreaking. The rains came and Father returned drenched because he didn't want to stop the service before its completion.

He was here during the construction and the difficult period of obtaining bids for tables, chairs, and all of the kitchen equipment. Father asked for reassignment because of some phone calls he was receiving. Rather than identify themselves, Father was left holding a dead phone. It happened so often that he felt that someone in the community did not want him to remain at St. Demetrios. A telegram containing hundreds of parishioners' names was sent to the Archdiocese indicating a vote of confidence in Father Karalexis. He could not be convinced to stay. We received word recently that Father James has retired.

Father Nicholas Geotes came to us at an advanced age. Although from Greece, he was accepted by the youth as if he were American born. He often spoke to them in Greek and he tried to impress on all of them the hundreds of English words which had a Greek derivation. Because Angie and I would always speak to him in Greek, he seemed to appreciate our showing him the respect he deserved.

Most of his bi-weekly bulletins were in Greek with some English included. Those were the days of no secretary, computers nor copying machines. Father typed on a Greek and on an English typewriter, mimeographed, addressed and mailed his message. As if he did not have enough to do with being our priest and secretary, Father found time to remove his collar every Thursday evening to assist the Bingo Committee in fund raising. Since the church was built during this time, Father had the additional task of selecting the companies and ordering all the donated stain glass windows, pews and most of the amenities that we see in the church today.

We asked Father Geotes to accompany us to Miami for the chandelier that was to adorn the church. Since it came from Greece, the customs authorities demanded that duty be paid. Through the efforts of Father Nick, we obtained a letter from Father Mekras of Miami's St. Sophia Cathedral that a church chandelier's illumination represents God being the Light of the World. This satisfied customs and we were given the additional challenge of piecing it together after its arrival in Daytona. No electrician would take the responsibility. A technician had to be brought from the Greek manufacturer for two weeks to assemble and supervise its installation under the dome of the church. Father Nick was very pleased that we had not chosen the typical crystal or glass chandelier seen in so many churches.

He was delighted to be able to participate in the religious ceremony of opening of the doors of our new church in 1975 and co-celebrating the first Divine Liturgy in the new edifice with His Grace Bishop Iacovos of Catania. Although Father retired, he remained in Daytona and served his church during the tenure of his successors. As he became older and weaker, he moved to live with his daughter. Both he and Presvytera passed away. May their memories be eternal.

Father George Papadeas was a well known priest for his many accomplishments in the Archdiocese including serving as Dean of the Archdiocesan Cathedral in the New York City. He chose a less stress-filled life by coming to our community and we were fortunate to profit by his vast experience. Shortly after his arrival he quickly realized that our church was having some financial difficulties so he did not hesitate to propose that we have a Festival. Although most on the Parish Council, including myself, were skeptical of our ability to accomplish this monumental feat, he had his vision and he forged ahead and proved that we could under his direction. It has become an event that is the highlight of central Florida's Fall calendar. Thousands have been exposed to our religion, our cuisine and our culture thanks to Father George and the Festival.

Every morning, a small group of Parish Council members would convene at Father George's office for an hour to discuss church affairs and, sometimes, the latest gossip. Although Father had more important matters that needed his attention, he dedicated the time to hearing the ideas and suggestions for the betterment of the church. He listened patiently and I often wondered what were his true thoughts.

His personal touch of sending hand-written notes and letters of encouragement, well wishes, thanks or sympathy are synonymous of Father George.

Although he decided to retire, he continues God's work by conducting church services and fund raising for Florida churches that are in need of his assistance. When asked to assist in sacraments at his beloved St. Demetrios, everyone marvels at his endless source of energy and enthusiasm. May God grant him many more healthy years.

Father Nicholas Manousakis was the outstanding choice of the parish council after interviewing many candidates to fill the vacancy of Father George. Although two of our former priests still lived here, Father Nick built on their programs by initiating new ideas for the betterment of our church and community.

Under Father Nick's direction and organizational skills, we have hosted two Diocesan Choir Conferences, an Archdiocesan Oratorical Conference and a Diocese Clergy-Laity Conference. The accolades from all who attended these events were well worth the hard work involved in hosting them. Were it not for Father being a stickler for details, these events could not have been as successful.

He is our first priest who has conducted the beautiful forty day blessing of infants while all parishioners are still in church. He is the first to recognize couples blessed with fifty years of marriage, to have Godparent/Godchild Sundays, when both are expected to take Communion, and to have Alumni Altar Boy Sunday and to have Father/Son Altar Boy Sunday. His "Beach Reach", which involves young people from throughout the Diocese, includes a fun-filled, spiritual weekend.

I will always be grateful to Father Nick for his concern for my dad who could not attend church in the latter years of his life. It was not unusual to see Father come out of the church after Liturgy, in his vestments, carrying the Holy Chalice and walking to our home to give my father Holy Communion on special Feast Days. Dad would always thank him with, "God bless you."

During the nearly twenty years since Father Manousakis arrived, he has encouraged every Parish Council to show either appreciation or recognition of those deserving individuals in the parish. He initiated the St. Demetrios Day Appreciation Celebrations. The first celebration was to honor Jim Forest, the second was for Theodore Kypreos, the third for Nicholas S. Boulmetis and Margo Kiriakes, the fourth for Sam Constant, Helen Kattouf and Mosko Paspalakakis, and the last one in 1990 for Irene Koutouzis and George Moutsopoulos. In the meantime, Dr. James & Harriet Carratt were honored with a testimonial banquet in January 2002. It was the first testimonial to recognize both husband and wife for their many years of service to their church.

While some of our altar boys complain that Father is too strict and too much of a disciplinarian, we are all so proud of them all. It never ceases to amaze me to watch young, restless boys performing their duties especially during the very long services of Holy Week. I am sure that each of them has a story to tell and each of them has probably been admonished by their priest for not standing tall and for not being attentive.

After church services on the Feast Day of St. Nicholas in 2000, Presvytera Kostoula told us that Fr. Nick was not feeling well. His visit to the emergency room that evening resulted in a very major, lengthy operation. Although no one knew at the time, we later were told by the doctors that very few ever recover from the procedure. By God's Grace, the prayers of parishioners and an additional operation, Father Nick eventually returned to resume his duties as a patient who had personally experienced a miracle. He has resumed his duties as if nothing ever occurred. We hope and pray that he continues to enjoy good health.

Fr. Constantine Regopoulos served during Fr. Nick's recovery. He will be remembered for his jovial, good humor and for the many homes and businesses that he blessed during the Epiphany period. He came as a stranger and left as a friend to everyone that was touched by his humble nature.

**These were some ladies that were at Saint Demetrios
since its early beginnings. Read their stories and let us
see how we measure up as “modern Greek women.”**

Sophia Dritsas (Forest) was born in Corinth, Greece. Her mother died when Sophia was very young. Her father was left to raise four young children alone when an earthquake leveled the entire town. Their lives were spared when they raced to the hilltops at the edge of town. She has vivid memories of living in tents and of the Red Cross providing food and supplies.

Soon she became engaged to a young Corinthian, Demetrios Fooryiotis (Jim Forest) who had established himself in America. After their wedding they came to Daytona Beach with her cousin, Pauline George and her infant son, Gabriel.

Jim owned a restaurant but before Sophia and he became settled in Daytona Beach, the banks closed and the Great Depression began. Jim struggled to provide while Sophia occupied herself with her small apartment and visited with the few Greeks who lived here at that time. Rather than return to Greece as they had planned, they began a family with the arrival of Michael and then Angie.

With the onset of World War II, our small town lost all of its tourists and all lights had to be shielded from the ocean. Enemy ships were common off our shores. Jim bought a restaurant, which he operated for four years in Starke, Florida near the Army's Basic Training Center at Camp Blanding. He developed a bleeding ulcer and hemorrhaged. He was rushed to the nearest civilian hospital in St. Augustine with his wife and children in tow. The children stayed with a Greek lady, an acquaintance, while Sophia traveled by foot the fifteen blocks early in the morning and returned in the late evening to the boarding house where her two and five year old stayed. She was terrified for her safety and terrified that her husband would perish. Her only relatives were Pauline and Pauline's brother, Jimmy Poulos who lived in Daytona.

Jim survived and they moved back to Daytona where he bought property and a business on the Boardwalk in the mid 1940's. Through the years, the young family longed for the company of Greeks and traveled many miles for visits. They hungered to worship in a Greek Orthodox church and drove three uncomfortable hours in the 1940's and 1950's to Jacksonville for Good Friday evening services. Eventually, in 1952, their prayers were answered when our Saint Demetrios opened on Cypress Street.

As early as the 1940's, Sophia and a small group of ladies founded St. Barbara's Philoptochos. Because there were so few members, the society pretty much laid dormant until the church opened and the group began its work as "the true right arm of the church."

Sophia served many years as board member, treasurer and vice president. She cooked, baked, cleaned, sold tickets and pastries and manned rummage sales. She was fully involved until Jim retired and later became confined to the house. He passed away in 1989.

In the last 20 years, she has taken it upon herself to prepare floral wreaths for the icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Demetrios, St. Barbara, St. Nektarios and St. Photios.

Submitted by Angie Forest

Margo Drakakis was born in Greece on the island of Paros. She was one of six children born to Nicholas and Kallypso Drakakis. In 1939, she married Nick Xynidis, a first engineer in the Greek Merchant Marines. Their son, Steve, was born in November 1940 just as World War II was beginning. Tragically, Margo was notified that Nick had been killed in action in 1942.

Margo and her young son left for America in hopes of a better life. They settled near family in Saint Augustine where she worked long hours, seven days a week in a restaurant.

In 1953, Margo met Christ Kiriakes and they were married. They moved to Daytona in 1954 where Tasso was born. Once again, in 1960, Margo's husband passed away leaving her with another young son to raise.

Through the years she struggled to care for her young family. She worked every day while she served the needs of the young community by cooking, keeping the altar clean, sewing ornamental cloths for the altar and tables and provided counsel for the priests and Parish Council.

She has always made herself available to do whatever was within her realm. Her energy and vitality are an inspiration to many half her age. Her untiring hours assisting at the annual Festival leaves many wondering as to her secret for success. Her deep faith has sustained her and continues to give her strength.

Submitted by Margo Kiriakes

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Georgia Magoulas was born in McKee's Rock, Pennsylvania. My family was living in Washington, D. C. when I met my husband, Nickolas Magoulas. He was born in Kadavatho on the island of Cephalonia in Greece. He came to America around 1921. His brother, Jerry, brought Nick to my father's restaurant where I was working. Nick and I met in 1934 while I was serving him lunch. We had two boys, Tony and Costa. Tony (Ft. Worth, TX) was born while we were still living in Washington, D. C. and Costa (Daytona Beach, FL) was born in Charleston, South Carolina.

My brother-in-law, Petros, was an avid supporter of the Greek Orthodox Church and was always making donations, not only as a founding father of our beloved St. Demetrios but to other parishes as well. Petros was a joint partner in a property in Daytona known as The Pier Casino. Upon his death in 1947 or 1948 the property went to my husband, Nick. Nick came to Daytona first by himself for about one year and then the boys and I moved to Daytona afterwards in 1949.

The property on Cypress Street was the only property available in Daytona at the time the founding fathers wanted to make their purchase. I remember these men included Mr. Melachrino, Mr. Paidas and Mr. Forest who were all Jimmy's so St. Demetrios was chosen as the patron saint. Before we had that property, church services were held in a small room at the motel the Kattouf family owned and operated. There were no altar boys until the church moved to Cypress Street.

The Philoptochos ladies took turns hosting meetings in their homes and sponsored many dinners during the early years. When there was a dance, Nick would sometimes bartend. When someone would place their drink order and put down a \$20 bill expecting change, Nick would give them their order, take the \$20 and thank them for their donation to the church! I also remember that Clara Sotirin and I were always in the kitchen cleaning up after church dinners. All us women made sure to always greet strangers that came to church and to make sure they felt welcomed.

My brother in law passed away 1947 or 48 due to complications of kidney disease and was buried in Charleston. A few years later his body was moved to his hometown in Greece where he always wanted to be buried. My husband, Nick, died in 1968 - the same year the three astronauts died in that terrible fire in the space capsule. He is buried at Bellevue Memorial Gardens (Daytona Memorial).

Submitted by Georgia Magoulas

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Clara (Sotirin) Houllis was born May 4, 1925 in Weirton, West Virginia. My husband, James Sotirin, came to America with his brother, Mike, when he was 15 years old. He took over their father's business which was a shoe repair store and ice cream parlor in Brunswick, Georgia. Their father then went back to Greece and stayed there. I first met my husband, James, in Tarpon Springs and we got married August 28, 1946 in Martins Ferry, Ohio where I lived at that time. We lived in St. Augustine for nine years where he operated the Neptune Restaurant. Both of my children, Nicholas and Emanuel, were born in St. Augustine. They both live in Daytona Beach. Nicholas, the oldest, operates C. J.'s Auto Sales and Emanuel operates the Phoenix Gym.

Bishop Germanos Polizoides knew my mother from Tarpon Springs so he was invited to stay in our home when visiting Daytona. He loved the view of the river from his front bedroom. He enjoyed the long walk to the Main Street area where most of the Greeks had businesses.

My first husband died August 16, 1978. I am presently married to George Houllis. When I was President of the Philoptochos, I remember Archbishop Iacovos visited our little church. We had the reception in our small hall behind the church. We were very excited about his visit! When we had dances and dinners, Valencia Poulos and I would go door to door to sell our tickets.

Submitted by Clara Sotirin Houllis

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Niza Karpodinis was born in Puerto Rico. I met my husband, George, in Maracaibo, Venezuela. From there we went to Puerto Rico to await the birth of our daughter, Elizabeth. George went to New York to join his brother, Alex, and to start a business. Our baby daughter and I followed, arriving in New York the following year in August 1946. Our son, George, was born in Brooklyn and the family lived in North Plainfield, New Jersey before coming to Daytona Beach.

Our young family became very active in church when services were in the Batista house. I later served as President of the Philoptochos in 1988-1989. George served as President of the Parish Council in 1978-1979. George was very involved with Theodore Kypreos during the construction of the church and the community center. Both children were fully involved in the Sunday School and young George served as an altar boy. Elizabeth lives in Aiken, South Carolina and George lives in Manhattan.

I remember how hot and uncomfortable it was wearing hat and gloves to church in those early years. On a particular Sunday, Valencia Poulos was in charge of the coffee hour. Someone had suggested adding a touch of salt to the water to enhance the flavor of the coffee. Valencia followed the advise with gusto but it turned into a disaster. I never saw so many parishioners spitting in my life.

My husband, George, passed away May 23, 1992.

Submitted by Niza Karpodinis

Sarah Stratos was born in a tiny town of Newington, Georgia, near Savannah. I was one of ten children. There were five girls and five boys.

I was living in Lakeland, Florida when Dr. James Carratt's father, Evangelos, and his cousin, Sam Stratos, came there. I was sent to show the men around the town as they were looking for a location to open a movie theater. By the end of the tour, I couldn't stand to be with Sam for another minute. Sam wasn't to be denied. Five years later, he asked me to marry him. Finally, my response was, "What took you so long?" We were married in Palatka.

When our first son, Costa, was to be born, Sam took me to Thomasville, Georgia where many of his Greek friends lived. The same nurse brought our second son, Chris, into the world. We were to live in Starke and Monticello, Florida before settling in Daytona Beach permanently.

After I married I became totally immersed in the Greek culture. Sam was to become president of the Saint Demetrios Parish Council. We visited Greece eight times before Sam's death in 1979. Sons, Costa and Chris, live in Daytona Beach and I have one surviving sister that lives in Lakeland.

Submitted by Sarah Stratos

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Stamie Vitsaras (Kypreos) was born on the island of Simi, Greece. I came to America in 1921 to join my father who had become established in Orlando. My brother, Dominick, met an old friend, Theodore Kypreos, while they were both in Tarpon Springs for the Epiphany services. Dominick brought Theo to Orlando to meet his sister, Stamie. We were married in 1935 and moved to Theo's home in Charleston, South Carolina where Irene and Stanley were born. In 1938, the family moved to DeLand where my father and my brother lived. Spiro, my third child, was born there.

Dominick's wife was a teacher of Greek. She taught her children and the Michaelos children in DeLand. Respected for her knowledge and her demeanor, she was elected the first President of our Philoptochos. Father Nephon Demetriou had organized the ladies and suggested that they adopt St. Barbara, the Healer, as their saint.

The Kypreos family moved to Daytona Beach permanently in the early 1950's. Theo became President of the Parish Council in 1955, three years after the church opened its doors. In 1960, I was elected President of Philoptochos. I accepted the leadership with \$220.36 in the checking account. One of the first disbursements was \$45 to the Parish Council for church cleaning expenses for June, July and August. A rummage sale netted us \$415.60 and a bake sale \$149.69 which helped our treasury. We sent \$100 to St. Basil's Academy, gave Father Athas a \$15 Christmas gift and \$5 was given to a destitute traveler. After a dinner and dance at the Pier Casino, the Philoptochos paid \$18 for cleaning and for washing all the dishes and flatware.

In 1962, there was a bouzoukia and vasilopita party. \$765.50 was collected with \$391.77 in expenses. I added \$1.27 so that the total profit was \$375.00. The ladies worked long and hard for one reason - a new church and community center.

My daughter, Irene, became Philoptochos President in 1980.

Submitted by Stamie Kypreos

More Memories

Submitted by Angie Forest, another lifelong resident

As very young children, our parents sent us to the Episcopal Church Sunday School. On Easter and Christmas, they joined us at the church services in a show of appreciation for “taking their kids in”.

When our first priest arrived we attended St. Demetrios, of course. Our father asked the priest to teach us to read and write Greek. The extra money didn't interest Father Nephon and there was no way to convince him to teach. During that summer dad gave up on the priest and contacted the Greek school teacher in Jacksonville. She had been a family friend for years. With her Parish Council's blessing, Mrs. Marie left her family, rode the bus to Daytona on Monday, stayed in our home until Friday afternoon and would ride the bus back to Jacksonville. She had two teaching sessions a day for the entire summer. What a sacrifice on her part and what determination on our parents part!

Father Athas initiated Vacation Bible School. When I arrived for the first session, there were a number of younger children but not one in my age group. I truly wanted to learn about our church and Father made me feel welcome by putting me to work as “my assistant.” I participated by listening to the lesson and helped by serving the refreshments. The two weeks were over too quickly and I can say, without too much exaggeration, that everything I know about Orthodoxy I learned in that summer bible school. I still refer to the books Father gave us.

As our church grew, I remember the austere years when I was anointed by President Theodore Kypreos as “the lifetime decorator” for the affairs in our community center. Most of the dances were \$3 to \$5 for adults so the budget for decorations were limited to zero. What a chore in using available baby food jars, church candles, a bit of ingenuity and fern from our home to create something clever. I was so relieved to see that we had come of age and could finally afford huge, commercial arrangements to decorate our Community Center for the opening of St. Demetrios.

September 4, 2002, Wednesday morning, we awoke to the awful news. George Moutsopoulos had passed away just as he was starting his day. Our family was shaken to the core as was the entire community as they too heard the terrible news.

We can honestly say that there is no other parishioner that has touched so many lives at Saint Demetrios. He was a psalti, choir director, Parish Council member and secretary, dance instructor, active in Greek School, AHEPA and the VIP organization. From the moment George assisted the priest with infants' forty day blessing, to baptisms, weddings, funerals, memorials and everything in between, George was there for us. What a huge void he leaves in the Saint Demetrios community! May his memory be eternal. We will never forget him.

Submitted by Katherine and Steve G. Pappas

George S. Pappas, born August 18, 1951, was taken by his parents, Katharine and Steve G. Pappas, to Fr. George Kattouf's home for their son's 40-day service. The community did not have a church at that time. For George's baptism, their friend, Fr. Chrys Papalambrou, drove to Daytona Beach from Charlotte, N. C., where he was the priest, to baptize George on Feb. 18, 1952. (Fr. Chrys later became a Bishop.) He had been the priest in Charlotte when Katharine and Steve were married on June 12, 1947. Since there was no parish in Daytona Beach at that time, Fr. Chrys felt it necessary to come here to perform the baptism using the Holy Trinity By The Sea Episcopal Church on North Grandview. Then when the community had its first services later in 1952 at the wooden church on Cypress Street, George became the first to be given communion at that church.

Steve was on the staff of the Charlotte News when he decided to join another newspaper and applied to the papers in Atlanta, Richmond and Daytona Beach. The News-Journal responded first. He came for an interview and got the job. Katharine wanted to go to Richmond and when Steve later got offers from them, too, he felt since he had accepted the Daytona Beach offer, he should move here, which they did in June 1950.

Katherine's mother was Aphrodite Kalas, known to her friends as Freda. In 1940, Mrs. Kalas, a widow with five children, moved to Daytona Beach from Spartanburg, S. C. She bought the Spot Cafe on the corner of Main Street and Atlantic Avenue from Jim Forest. A few years later when she sold the cafe, she and James Danas decided to form a business partnership and opened a restaurant on Main Street, halfway between the ocean and the river. Her partner suggested the restaurant needed a bar. The bar area was built and the restaurant specialized in Chinese and Italian dishes. Later, when the restaurant side was closed, the area next to the bar became a package store, known as the Tropical Bar and Package Store. She and Danas got married. In the mid-1960's they sold the bar and package store and retired. Both were active in the Greek community and Danas was among those who participated in the search for a Greek Orthodox church site on the Peninsula.

Fulgencio Batista, who was president of Cuba, had a home on the riverfront in Daytona Beach. He was often a patron at the Tropical Bar and met the owners. Batista met other Greeks in the Main Street area. Pappas met Batista when the Cuban leader spoke to the Rotary Club of Daytona Beach. At that time, Pappas was a reporter at the News-Journal. When the story appeared in the paper, Batista called Pappas to tell him he liked the story and after that they frequently got together to talk about Cuba and world affairs. When Batista moved to Europe he and Pappas kept in touch.

Batista decided to sell his riverfront home and put it on the market for \$95,000, then a huge sum of money. Several among the Greek community came up with the suggestion that an attempt be made to buy that property as a site for our church. It had a beautiful home built by R. E. Olds near the turn of the 19th century. This was the Olds who first built and sold Oldsmobile cars. At a meeting that included Theo Kypreos, Jim Forest, Charles Panos, James Danas, Alex George, Bill Carnation, Steve Pappas and a couple of others, it was decided to make an offer to Batista. Pappas composed and typed the first letter and it was signed by Father John P. Athas. In the letter it was said the Greek community wanted to build a church on the property and offered him \$25,000. Batista responded by saying he liked the idea of seeing a church there, but \$25,000 was not enough. The "committee" took a chance and Pappas typed another letter, also signed by Father Athas, offering him \$35,000. Batista accepted the offer and these pioneers had no problem borrowing the \$35,000. Banks jumped at the chance to lend the necessary \$35,000 to the "committee".

At first, services were in the living room of the house on the property. Pappas served as Council President in 1960 and described himself as the "Fastest Gavel in the East". No meeting could last more than an hour. As his watch neared the end of the hour, Pappas would hold up his gavel, letting everyone know the gavel was ready to hit the desk. And it did. BANG and the meeting was adjourned.

The Community Center, with a beautiful view of the Halifax River, was built first. Then when the time came to build a church, the house, built by R. E. Olds, and which at one time was owned by a president of Cuba, was demolished. St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church was built and today it's a landmark admired by tourists and natives alike.

Submitted by Desi Perakis

For fifteen years I taught Sunday School. Once I mentioned to my class that we were working of the festival and little Tasso Kirakes raised his hand and said his mother would make seven pans of baklava. Nothing has changed; he still volunteers his mother.

Three year old Dino Paspalakis (Steno's son) came to class with older children who were practicing their poems. Dino said he would like to say one, too. When it came time for him to recite, he told Father Athas that he had already said it in the classroom and he was done.

When we had dances we would go the Greek owned businesses and ask for donations of money, food or liquor. Almost everything was donated before the affair so all of the proceeds remained in the Philoptochos or church coffers. Tickets were bought even by the generous families that had just donated goods.

Mary Ellen Perakis Papadeas remembers that the kids use to ride up and down the dumbwaiter in the Batista house and often times they would get stuck between floors. She also remembers the kids going down to the pool house on the river to play.

Submitted by Nick Leras

One of my fondest memories of our days as newlyweds was the St. Demetrios basketball team. It was Steno Augustine, Costa Magoulas, Tony Melachrino, Chris Theos, Steve Xynidis and me. None of us was particularly tall as basketball players go, but we won almost every church and YMCA tournament we entered. We didn't need to call time outs in order to design strategies, we'd just talk Greek.

Our games were well attended, Father Athas in particular, came to many of them. At the time Chris and I were the only ones married, Becky and Alex came to all the games. Becky would encourage Chris by calling out, "Come on Love Buggy!" Of course, the guys began calling him by his new name.

There was one game that stands out in my mind. We were playing at the First Baptist Church. Their gym was on the fourth floor. It was pretty tight quarters. If you ran a fast break (usually by Steve), you'd make the layup, then your momentum would take you through the double doors and down a flight of steps. Then you'd have to run back up the steps to get back in the game.

There was one play in particular where Costa has the ball and Steve call, "Costa!". Just then a defender hits it out of his hand. There's a big pileup and Costa comes up with it. Steve calls, "Costa!". Again the ball gets knocked out of Costa's hands. Another scramble. Again Costa gets it. And again Steve calls for it. And with a voice filled with a sense of duty but also exhaustion he weakly called out, "I'm tryin'!". That was the only time in my memory that a game stopped for a number of minutes because all the players on both teams were laughing so hard.

That was one of the reasons I was happy that, several years later, we started a soccer team on which our kids played. It would have been wonderful if they could have had the camaraderie and fun we enjoyed for so many years. They played one game. I think they had a great time. But then we ran out of competition. There were no teams other than Jacksonville. But still, from what I observed, the kids of today get along beautifully.

Submitted by Jamie Leras

What really sticks in my mind all these years later, occurred when I was serving in the altar under Father Nick. Nick Petropouleas and Ted Stavracos, the "twin towers", were also there. When I first started as an altar boy I remember being really nervous and afraid that I would mess up and ruin the entire church service. This was especially true during the more complicated services leading up to major holidays like Christmas and Easter - we didn't really have rehearsals then. I would always picture myself tripping and dropping the communion "bread" all over the floor at Father Nick's feet in front of the entire congregation. I seem to recall that Father Nick ran a tight ship and didn't tolerate any "goofing" off by the altar boys. If we didn't line up properly or (heaven forbid) your candle went out as we walked through the church, Father Nick let you know he wasn't pleased without ever saying a word.

I remember a couple of incidents when, being boys, we would all be joking and laughing in one of the rooms to the side of the altar (usually before the service began) only to be met with a withering stare from Father Nick. He didn't have to say a word and we would all become silent immediately. I don't mean to exaggerate here, Father Nick was strict but never in a mean-spirited way. He just wanted us to take our positions seriously and show the proper respect for the service.

One Sunday I was responsible for holding the communion "bread." As I went to get the bowl from behind the altar screen, Father Geotes who was sitting in a chair behind the altar screen and facing the altar, motioned to me as I crossed behind the altar. I was surprised, and a little nervous, as I had never really spoken with him before and didn't quite know what he wanted. After a minute or two of some rather confused cross-altar hand signals I was made to understand that he wanted me to bring him some bread before I took it to Father Nick. So I wrapped up some bread in aluminum foil and quickly took it over to him and watched as he hungrily gulped it down. Since it had not yet been blessed, I wasn't really sure if this was allowed. Had Father not realized that the bread had not been blessed or if he was simply hungry because he missed breakfast.

Submitted by Olga Skordinski

Mike and I found a home with the St. Demetrios parish in 1977. Our first visit here was to sing with the choir of St. Simeon's Russian Orthodox Church in Titusville on the occasion of the Sunday of Orthodoxy. A short time later we were having dinner in a restaurant in Daytona Beach Shores and I thought I recognized the gentleman behind the counter as the choir director from the Greek church. He came over to our table and greeted us. Then he introduced himself - yes, it was George Moutsopoulos. We talked about choirs, music, etc. and he invited us to come and sing with his choir. At first we sat in the congregation and after a couple of weeks I found myself humming "Aios o Theos". Every Sunday George kept asking us when we would join the choir. We were reluctant to make a commitment. Mike thought I was wrong in not saying yes or no by procrastinating. We attended our first rehearsal - Mike never intended to join but he was talked into it by George.

At the conclusion of Pentacost Sunday, Father Papadeas asked the congregation, "Did you notice how great the choir sounded today? It is because we now have two Russians in the choir." This was a great welcome and the "Hi Lite" of Mike's position in this St. Demetrios family. We both have many warm feelings as part of the new family. I was thrilled to be selected to carry the banner of St. Barbara of the Epiphany procession. My grandfather would have been so proud.

I love being a church tour guide during the festival celebrations. It has been my duty and my extreme pleasure since 1980. We like to tell our friends that we are the Alpha and Omega of the Greek Festival. I do the church tours and Mike is the bartender.

The greatest happening was when Mike and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. The church awarded us the framed citation and the Philoptochos the bouquet of golden roses while the entire congregation wished us "Many Years". We are very happy and grateful to have found a home here in God's house, St. Demetrios Church, with you our brothers and sister in Christ.

Hagi & Hagina -Jerusalem May 1978

Submitted by Christina Papalambros Paspalakis

My greatest memories growing up at St. Demetrios was Sunday School, Greek dancing, GOYA and oratorical experiences. I always smile when I look back at my photo albums. The Sunday School classes had creative art projects that I still cherish today like the Christmas ornaments, icons, hand-made gifts for our parents and my perfect attendance awards/certificates.

Greek dancing was another one of my favorite memories. All my teachers were so excited to teach us and tell us stories of when they were little kids in Greece. They would not let us get away with anything but at the end, we all had a good time performing at the festival. It was so cool to have our American friends and teachers watch us dance at the festival and on television.

My GOYA memories were awesome. Our annual beach parties and lock-ins were the best. I began some of my closest friendships that I still share today. All our parents were fighting to be advisors. Every advisor came to every event and guided us with the meetings and the fund-raisers. They were great role models and taught us to be great leaders.

My oratorical memories were a great learning experience. I was so nervous giving my speeches because I would write them the night before, but once I was done, I was so thankful. When we traveled to the other churches, I would love to listen and learn from the others. This helped me be a leader in many organizations - Maids of Athens, speech classes in high school and college, and in my career as a teacher.

I am so thankful to all my teachers and those who have inspired me to become a Sunday School and Greek dance teacher. I feel it is my honor and obligation to pay back those special individuals and I hope and pray that my son will follow in being an active Christian member of our beloved St. Demetrios.

Submitted by Virginia Sotirin

I remember going to the Batista house with Angie Constant, Alexandra Macos and my youngest son, Mitchell, and finding the doors locked due to some mix up. Not to be deterred our group spread out and began trying windows and doors. Finally, Angie and I gave little Mitchell a boost in hopes that he could squeeze through a small open window. Just as we were straining to balance Mitch, you can image how startled we were to see Alexandra appear at the window from the inside. She had found an open window and was ready to give her friends a fright. We still laugh as we think back to that time.

Submitted by George S. Pappas

Father Athas had each of us altar boys take a turn standing in front of the icon screen to lead the congregation in the Lord's prayer or the Niceen creed. A frightening experience that burned the holy words in my memory.

Submitted by Vickie Creticos Kaniaris

I was at the Cypress Street church and in the second grade. Father Athas left quite an impression on me. He taught Greek School and the religious classes.

Father made all the costumes for the Christmas play from crepe paper. I was a donkey that sang "Silent Night" in Greek.

At the Batista house, I sang in the choir from the time I was 13 until I was 21. Kathy Panagos was our choir director.

I remember our first Easter with lambs roasting on a spit donated by Mr. Forest. It made quite an impression watching my brother and other young men of the parish working all night preparing for the picnic after the Agape service. Under a huge Oak tree near the river, donated picnic tables had been set up with a huge crowd enjoying the Easter feast. An unforgettable GOYA Italian dinner with checkered table cloths still is one of the best affairs that we ever had. As a young girl, it was really special and great fun for all.

Submitted by Stacy Striegel

I have so many special memories of our church. All of my experiences with Sunday School, GOYA, Greek School, dancing at the festivals and so much more that has been a major part of my life. Along with my family, my yiayias were always a strong influence in my Christian life. I thank my parents for bringing me up in the church and I will do the same for my daughter.

Submitted by Michael Striegel

The first person that welcomed me into the Greek church was Stacy's yiayia, Anastasia. That opened the door to my future with Stacy. With Fr. Nick's guidance, I joined the Orthodox Church. I am very grateful to both of them.

Submitted by Litsa Sarantos

There are so many memories that are always a part of me - Mr. Makris calling us back into Greek School, while we hid in the choir robes - laughing hysterically when we messed up a dance at the festival - learning from Fr. Nick the importance of getting work done on time when it came to the GOYA messenger article - standing with my yiayia, Garifalo, and singing "Christos Anesti" with our candles held high - being scared to death of my first oratorical speech, never knowing that experience would help me realize what career I wanted to pursue. And that could never be possible without Christina Paspalakis and, especially Anne Stratis. There are people in your life that influence you more than they ever know. To my yiayias watching over me from heaven, my parents, my sister and all those who helped me become who I am today - thank you!

Submitted by Costa Magoulas

I remember coming to Daytona Beach with my family when I was 8 years old. There was no Greek Orthodox church so my mother took me to Holy Trinity by the Sea Episcopal Church on N. Grandview. At the first service we attended, I remember wishing I was the altar boy carrying the tall silver cross. I later learned that it was Michael Forest. I learned that I was too young to be an altar boy so my mother enrolled us in the children's choir. Each week, when you came to rehearsal, you were given a shiny new dime. You could buy a moon pie and an R.C. with that.

In 1952, when our church opened, the Episcopal priest asked our mother if we could still attend choir practice and sing for special events even though we attended our own church. They were short of voices.

When a Greek family had a party, families from as far away as Cocoa, St. Augustine and Tarpon Springs were invited. One of the most memorable parties was given by the Melachrinis family at their home in New Smyrna Beach by the ocean. The party started early with all the men walking deep into the ocean with a large seine net. They made a large circle and pulled the net to shore. They brought in fish, crabs and conch until there was enough for all the guests. The men roasted lambs outside while the ladies prepared everything else. The dancing began in the evening with the men dancing together. One man danced with a bottle on his head, never spilling a drop. I have no memories of anyone getting drunk or any problem. It was a beautiful evening of families sharing their culture and friendship together.

In the early days of church there were only three high school age boys and one middle school boy. They wanted to form a basketball team to play in the church league which was open to all faiths. They recruited a mutual friend to make the fifth player, so St. Demetrios sponsored its first team. They played the entire season with five players and went on to win the church league championship beating the large Catholic Church which had ten players. Our tiny team continued to win for two more years until the boys graduated leaving no one to carry on the tradition.

When Father Athas came to our community, he tried to bring us all together. He never knew what to expect from our group. Of course, he was fasting for forty days during the Lenten period. My father prepared lobster for him and Father Athas raved about how good it was. When he was finished, he asked what had been done to make it so tasty. My father, with a twinkle in his eye, announced in front of everyone, that the secret was to baste the lobster with the juice of the prime rib.

One of the most memorable memories from my childhood was the first time the church decided to go caroling. Father Athas gathered five choir members and some Parish Council members. We began singing at everyone's homes. I never ate so much in my life. We weren't allowed to merely sing and leave. We had to go into each home and accept their hospitality. Many times, there were tears in their eyes as we sang. For many, it was the first time anyone sang carols in their home since coming to Florida. We collected nearly \$1,000 and, in those days, that was a tremendous amount of money.

Submitted by Dr. James A. Carratt

During a General Assembly in 1973, the parishioners unanimously voted to proceed with the construction of the church and authorized the Parish Council to commence the project without asking for prior approval for the plans. The donations of sixty three families of the community plus donations of Batista and proceeds from a will left by a Mrs. Pappas allowed us to begin construction.

Due to the limitations of funds, a dome over the chapel and the bell tower had to be eliminated. Theodore Kypreos, George Karpodinis, Michael Forest and I were still trying to find a way to, at least, build the bell tower without success, so construction of the church proceeded without the additional amenities.

While I was working in my yard one Sunday afternoon, I dropped everything and called Mr. Kypreos and Mr. Forest and proposed that the three of us should obtain a personal loan and construct the bell tower. Without hesitation, they both immediately agreed to the idea. The contractor would have to be contacted and told of our plans in order to eliminate the concrete that had been poured at the site.

Mr. Kypreos called me back the same afternoon and said, "Give me a day to contact certain individuals that might feel offended that they were not asked to contribute to the construction of the bell tower." The following morning, nine additional parishioners were contacted and, within three hours, the necessary funds were collected for the project. Although they had stretched their budgets helping fund the construction of the church, they each contributed \$2,000 for a total of \$26,000. A loan was not necessary. This was just one example of how strong the community spirit and willingness existed in the community.

The contributors were: James Apostolou, James Carratt, Costa Drakakis, Michael Forest, George Karpodinis, Margo Kiriakes, Theodore Kypreos, William Macos, Mosko Paspalakakis, Steno Paspalakakis, Dino Perakis, Mike Perakis and Leon Velousis.

Editor's Note - We asked many individuals to jot down their memories of the early days of the church. We are thankful to those who took the time to share their thoughts with all of us. We think that it adds a personal touch to the history of our parish and community.