

## Virtual rituals give expat Greeks a chance to live out their faith from abroad



Two factors have defined Greek life for at least the past century: religion and emigration.

Now, a new startup, Do My Tama, is helping ex-pats stay connected to their faith and families by offering to perform religious devotions, virtual pilgrimages and other religious services.

Unlike many Western European countries, where the percentage of the pious is down to single digits, Greeks have held fast to the Greek Orthodox Church, with some 55% saying religion is very important to their lives in an October 2018 report from the Pew Research Center.

That attachment has stuck with the more than 1.7 million Greeks who have left since the early 1900s — including half a million who have sought opportunities overseas since the global economic crisis nearly forced Greece to crash out of the European Union in 2014.

“Most people asking for our services are members of the Greek diaspora,” said Maria Psiridi, Do My Tama’s founder. “(One) Greek who’s now working in China

asked us to light a candle and leave flowers on his mother's grave in Athens because he hadn't visited for three years."



Part of being a pious Greek Orthodox is doing tama, or oblation: a promise one gives to God in exchange for help with a difficult task. It often involves making an offering of a golden plate at the icon of a saint. If someone is undergoing eye surgery, for example, the plate would be stamped with a pair of eyes.

For those can't get to Greece, for \$40 to \$200, Do My Tama will take an oblation to the customer's preferred church, monastery or saint, light a candle or take a traditional Orthodox offering of bread. An additional \$70 gets a customer a video of the act.

Psiridi said she got the idea for the service last year, when a friend visited a church in Patmos, the Greek island where John, the author of the New Testament Book of Revelation, committed his visions to words, and the friend proceeded to light dozens of candles.

"I teased my friend by telling him he'll use up all the available candles," said Psiridi. "He replied that it's all requests from friends in the U.S. who heard he's going to Patmos and asked him to light candles for them. That's when it hit me."



Psiridi said her service also covers another need: work. She has established a network of about 100 locals to fulfill the requests, giving much-needed income to young people whose lives have been stalled by a post-crisis unemployment of 49% for those under 24.

Churches and charities, meanwhile, have seen their contributions drop sharply in the past decade as social service budgets have taken hits because of government austerity measures.

Psiridi divides the fees she charges among the surrogate performing the tama, the church at which it is performed and a Greek charity of the customer's choice. She takes a small percentage for the maintenance of the service.

When Psiridi's online service popped up last November, it promptly went viral in Greece, drawing as many critics as fans. On social media, some called the service a scam. Some church officials threatened legal action.

The board of directors of the Church of St. John the Russian in Evia, the site of one of the most popular pilgrimages in Greece, expressed outrage when it was listed on DoMyTama.com's initial [list](#) of places the service would visit on behalf of users.



“We have nothing to do with this initiative,” said the church’s website. “The Metropolitan of Chalkis and the members of the board of St. John don’t approve of this practice. ... Our legal advisor will send a formal complaint to those responsible for the website in order to take down any reference to St. John the Russian.”


**DO MY TAMA**

We help the Orthodox Christians of the world in fulfilling their tama in Greece.





Contact us  
+30 6946 174 155  
info@domytama.gr

We also answer in

**Step 1: Choose Geographical Area**



**Step 2: Select Tama**

<p><b>Commemoration</b></p>  <p>With absolute discretion on our part, we accept the names of the loved ones for whom you want to pray, either for health or for their resting.</p> <p>We transfer your request to the priests of the church of your choice, giving them also the list of</p>	<p><b>Candle</b></p>  <p>We are at your disposal if you wish to light a candle for you or for those you love in the church of your choice.</p> <p>The candle will be labeled with your name and / or the name of the person you are praying for.</p>	<p><b>Prosforo</b></p>  <p>Prosforo which is blessed during the liturgy of the Divine Eucharist in the temple you want. Our Christian brothers and sisters should know that the Priest prays in favor of those that have offered these Gifts in every Divine Liturgy. He pleads and prays for the blessing of their families, their</p>	<p><b>Tama</b></p>  <p>Your tama can take any form you desire on any metallic material. We deeply understand the sanctity of your promise to God, the Virgin Mary or a Saint and we guarantee that your tama will arrive on the day you ask, in the church you want.</p>
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Another pilgrimage originally listed was Our Lady of Tinos, on the island of Tinos. Every Aug. 15, the feast day on which Christians celebrate the bodily assumption of Jesus’ mother, Mary, into heaven, thousands of pilgrims travel the kilometer (six-tenths of a mile) from the ferry port to the shrine on their knees. The Our Lady of Tinos shrine is one of the most visited and wealthy shrines across Greece, with annual earnings of more than \$4 million.

The board of Our Lady of Tinos island, which is dedicated to an icon of Virgin Mary believed to be the source of miracles, threatened “to take legal action for the protection of the institution and the pilgrims’ reverence,” it said in a statement.

The mockery, skepticism and anger surprised and saddened Psiridi. Still, she said, she never received any formal complaints nor has anyone sued her.

“I was so sad for two days after the trolling and the hate messages started,” she said. “I think people didn’t get what we tried to do. I was surprised because we’re a team trying to bring together Greeks and do good.”

Psiridi points to an 18-year-old woman in Australia who had one of the Do My Tama team members go to a village in northern Greece and light a candle at the local church. After the young woman received the video of the oblation, she showed it to her grandmother, who burst into tears of joy.

– Source: [religionnews.com](http://religionnews.com)