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U.S. Department of Justice

Immigration and Naturalization Service

OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS
425 Eye Street N.W.
ULLB, 3rd Floor
Washington, D.C. 20536



Public Copy

File: EAC-00-134-51802

Office: Vermont Service Center

Date:

AUG 09 2001

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:



Petition: Petition for Special Immigrant Religious Worker Pursuant to Section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4), as described at Section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(C)

IN BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



Identifying data deleted to prevent clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy

INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision in your case. All documents have been returned to the office which originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or the analysis used in reaching the decision was inconsistent with the information provided or with precedent decisions, you may file a motion to reconsider. Such a motion must state the reasons for reconsideration and be supported by any pertinent precedent decisions. Any motion to reconsider must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider, as required under 8 C.F.R. 103.5(a)(1)(i).

If you have new or additional information which you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reopen. Such a motion must state the new facts to be proved at the reopened proceeding and be supported by affidavits or other documentary evidence. Any motion to reopen must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reopen, except that failure to file before this period expires may be excused in the discretion of the Service where it is demonstrated that the delay was reasonable and beyond the control of the applicant or petitioner. Id.

Any motion must be filed with the office which originally decided your case along with a fee of \$110 as required under 8 C.F.R. 103.7.

FOR THE ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER,
EXAMINATIONS

Robert P. Wiemann
for Robert P. Wiemann, Acting Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The immigrant visa petition was denied by the Director, Vermont Service Center, and is now before the Associate Commissioner for Examinations on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a church. It seeks classification of the beneficiary as a special immigrant religious worker pursuant to section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the "Act"), 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4), in order to employ her as a coordinator for its foreign mission activities at a salary of \$300 per week, or \$15,600 per year.

The director denied the petition finding that the duties of the proposed position were primarily secular and were not qualifying for classification as a religious occupation.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner submitted a written brief and additional documentation. Counsel argued that the beneficiary is qualified as a religious worker and that the position will be full-time.

Section 203(b)(4) of the Act provides classification to qualified special immigrant religious workers as described in section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(C), which pertains to an immigrant who:

(i) for at least 2 years immediately preceding the time of application for admission, has been a member of a religious denomination having a bona fide nonprofit, religious organization in the United States;

(ii) seeks to enter the United States--

(I) solely for the purpose of carrying on the vocation of a minister of that religious denomination,

(II) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization at the request of the organization in a professional capacity in a religious vocation or occupation, or

(III) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization (or for a bona fide organization which is affiliated with the religious denomination and is exempt from taxation as an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Code of 1986) at the request of the organization in a religious vocation or occupation; and

(iii) has been carrying on such vocation, professional work, or other work continuously for at least the 2-year

period described in clause (i).

The petitioner in this matter is an independent church that operates, in part, an international religious radio broadcast service and maintains liaison with some forty foreign missions. The beneficiary is described as a native and citizen of India. The record reflects that she entered the United States on an undisclosed date and manner, completed a course of study at a Bible college, and has been authorized for temporary employment with the petitioner from December 1, 1997 to December 31, 2000, in R-1 classification. It was stated that the beneficiary is fluent in at least six languages.

At issue is whether the petitioner has established that the proposed position qualifies as a religious occupation for the purpose of special immigrant classification.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3) states, in pertinent part, that each petition for a religious worker must be accompanied by:

(ii) A letter from an authorized official of the religious organization in the United States which (as applicable to the particular alien) establishes:

(A) That, immediately prior to the filing of the petition, the alien has the required two years of membership in the denomination and the required two years of experience in the religious vocation, professional religious work, or other religious work.

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(D) That, if the alien is to work in another religious vocation or occupation, he or she is qualified in the religious vocation or occupation. Evidence of such qualifications may include, but need not be limited to, evidence establishing that the alien is a nun, monk, or religious brother, or that the type of work to be done relates to a traditional religious function.

8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(2) states, in pertinent part, that:

Religious vocation means a calling to religious life evidenced by the demonstration of commitment practiced in the religious denomination, such as the taking of vows. Examples of individuals with a religious vocation include, but are not limited to, nuns, monks, and religious brothers and sisters.

Religious occupation means an activity which relates to a traditional religious function. Examples of

individuals in religious occupations include, but are not limited to, liturgical workers, religious instructors, religious counselors, cantors, catechists, workers in religious hospitals or religious health care facilities, missionaries, religious translators, or religious broadcasters. This group does not include janitors, maintenance workers, clerks, fund raisers, or persons solely involved in the solicitation of donations.

To establish eligibility for special immigrant classification, the petitioner must establish that the specific position that it is offering qualifies as a religious occupation as defined in these proceedings. The statute is silent on what constitutes a "religious occupation" and the regulation states only that it is an activity relating to a traditional religious function. The regulation does not define the term "traditional religious function" and instead provides a brief list of examples. The list reveals that not all employees of a religious organization are considered to be engaged in a religious occupation for the purpose of special immigrant classification. The regulation states that positions such as cantor, missionary, or religious instructor are examples of qualifying religious occupations. Persons in such positions must complete prescribed courses of training established by the governing body of the denomination and their services are directly related to the creed and practice of the religion. The regulation reflects that nonqualifying positions are those whose duties are primarily administrative or secular in nature. Persons in such positions must be qualified in their occupation, but they require no specific religious training or theological education.

The Service therefore interprets the term "traditional religious function" to require a demonstration that the duties of the position are directly related to the religious creed of the denomination, that specific prescribed religious training or theological education is required, that the position is defined and recognized by the governing body of the denomination, and that the position is traditionally a permanent, full-time, salaried occupation within the denomination.

The duties of the proposed position were described as acting as assistant to Rev. Carl H. Stevens, a minister employed by the petitioner in charge of its foreign mission work, in translating his radio broadcasts, letters, and writings into the appropriate foreign languages for dissemination abroad. The duties also included serving as a coordinator of the petitioner's various mission activities.

After careful review of the record, it must be concluded that the petitioner has failed to overcome the grounds for denial. The regulation defining a qualifying religious occupation is worded in a broad manner. This is to accommodate the range of religious

occupations in various religious traditions. A "religious translator" is listed as an example of a qualifying religious occupation. While the term is not defined in the regulations, this has traditionally been interpreted as a translator of original theological texts, and not contemporary translation of church documents, sermons, speeches, newsletters etc. The remaining duties are essentially those of an administrative assistant and are secular in nature, even though the individual would be employed by a religious organization.

It is noted that the director did not dispute the petitioner's claim that the beneficiary was qualified as a religious worker. However, in order to establish eligibility as a special immigrant religious worker, the petitioner must demonstrate that the proposed position is a qualifying religious occupation. The petitioner has failed to satisfy this requirement. The denial of this petition is without prejudice to the petitioner pursuing an alternate visa classification for the beneficiary.

Beyond the decision of the director, administrative notice is made that the petitioner failed to submit sufficient evidence, such as tax returns, to establish that the beneficiary was continuously employed by the petitioner for at least the two years preceding the filing of the petition as required by 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(1).

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. 1361. Here, the petitioner has not sustained that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.