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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

PUBLIC COPY

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS OFFICE
425 Eye Street N.W.
BCIS, AAO, 20 Mass, 3/F
Washington, D.C. 20536



File: WAC-01-217-54663 Office: California Service Center

Date: **APR 25 2003**

IN RE: Petitioner: [Redacted]
Beneficiary: [Redacted]

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)

ON 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 that 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 that 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 Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (Bureau) 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 that originally decided your case along with a fee of \$110 as required under 8 C.F.R. § 103.7.

Myra L. Rosenby
for Robert P. Wiemann, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The immigrant visa petition was denied by the Director, California Service Center, and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office 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 him as a "mission director" at a salary of \$14,400 per year.

The director denied the petition finding that the petitioner failed to establish that the beneficiary had been continuously engaged in a religious occupation for at least the two years preceding the filing of the petition.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner submitted a written statement and additional documentation.

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 a church affiliated with the Korean Methodist Church. It claims a congregation of approximately 80 registered members and an unspecified number of employees. The beneficiary is a native and citizen of Korea who was last admitted to the United States on February 27, 2000, as a B-2 visitor, who, the record reflects, remained beyond his authorized stay and has resided in the United States since such time in an unlawful status.

In order to establish eligibility for classification as a special immigrant religious worker, the petitioner must satisfy each of several eligibility requirements.

At issue in this matter is whether the petitioner established that the beneficiary had had the requisite two years of continuous experience in a religious occupation.

Regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(m)(1) states, in pertinent part, that:

All three types of religious workers must have been performing the vocation, professional work, or other work continuously (either abroad or in the United States) for at least the two year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition.

The petition was filed on June 21, 2001. Therefore, the petitioner must establish that the beneficiary was continuously carrying on a religious occupation since at least June 22, 1999.

In this case, the petitioner stated that it has employed the alien as a mission director since March 10, 2000. A letter was also submitted stating that the beneficiary was employed by an affiliated church in Korea from January 1995 through the date he departed for the United States.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner explained that, in preparing the beneficiary's 2000 Federal Income Tax Form 1040 and Schedule C-EZ part 1, the CPA erroneously indicated that the beneficiary derived his income from performing "Maintenance/Construction" work rather than from working for the petitioner. Counsel states that the income reflected on the forms was actually derived from employment for the petitioner from March 2000 to February 2001. However, counsel fails to address the fact that the entire tax package was initially prepared reflecting that the beneficiary was self-employed and that the sole purpose for filing the Schedule C-EZ was to corroborate the self-employment claim on the Form 1040. Counsel has not addressed these deficiencies. Doubt cast on any aspect of the petitioner's proof may lead to a reevaluation of the reliability and sufficiency of the remaining evidence offered in support of the visa petition. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence, and attempts to explain or reconcile such

inconsistencies, absent competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth, in fact, lies, will not suffice. Matter of Ho, 19 I&N Dec. 582 (BIA 1988).

The pertinent regulations were drafted in recognition of the special circumstances of some religious workers, specifically those engaged in a religious vocation, in that they may not be salaried in the conventional sense and may not follow a conventional work schedule. The regulations distinguish religious vocations from lay religious occupations. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(m)(2) defines a religious vocation, in part, as a calling to religious life evidenced by the taking of vows. While such persons are not employed *per se* in the conventional sense of salaried employment, they are fully financially supported and maintained by their religious institution and are answerable to that institution. The regulation defines lay religious occupations, in contrast, in general terms as an activity related to a "traditional religious function." *Id.* Such lay persons are employed in the conventional sense of salaried employment. The regulations recognize this distinction by requiring that in order to qualify for special immigrant classification in a religious occupation, the job offer for a lay employee of a religious organization must show that he or she will be employed in the conventional sense of salaried employment and will not be dependent on supplemental employment. See 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(m)(4). Because the statute requires two years of continuous experience in the same position for which special immigrant classification is sought, the Service interprets its own regulations to require that, in cases of lay persons seeking to engage in a religious occupation, the prior experience must have been full-time salaried employment in order to qualify as well.

The Service defines a religious occupation, in part, as full-time paid employment. Incidental voluntary activities with one's church are not considered engagement in a religious occupation and the services provided are not considered qualifying experience in a religious occupation. As previously stated by counsel, the CPA erred in preparing the beneficiary's taxes and that the income reflected was derived from the beneficiary's employment for the petitioner from March 2000 to February 2001. However, counsel fails to address the fact that the tax package reflects that the beneficiary was self-employed and that the sole purpose for filing the Schedule C-EZ was to corroborate the self-employment claim on the Form 1040. Doubt cast on any aspect of the petitioner's proof may lead to a reevaluation of the reliability and sufficiency of the remaining evidence offered in support of the visa petition. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence, and attempts to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies, absent competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth, in fact, lies, will not suffice. Matter of Ho, 19 I&N Dec. 582 (BIA 1988). Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the beneficiary has had the requisite

two years of continuous experience in a religious occupation. For this reason, the petition may not be approved.

Beyond the decision of the director, the petitioner has not demonstrated its ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner has not furnished the church's annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements. Therefore, the petitioner has not satisfied the documentary requirement of this provision. As the appeal will be dismissed on the grounds discussed, this issue need not be examined further.

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.