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

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

[REDACTED]

File: [REDACTED] Office: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER

Date: **JUL 10 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:

[REDACTED]

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.


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 (AAO) 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 an educational director at a monthly salary of \$1,500.

The director denied the petition, finding that the beneficiary's part-time volunteer work with the petitioner was insufficient to satisfy the requirement that he had been continuously carrying on a religious occupation for at least the two years preceding the filing of the petition.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner submits a brief.

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, incorporated in California in 1995. The petitioner provided the Bureau with a copy of its membership list written in Korean. It submitted evidence that it has the appropriate tax exempt recognition. The beneficiary entered the United States on December 18, 1995 as an F-1 nonimmigrant academic student.

At issue in this proceeding is whether the beneficiary had been continuously carrying on a religious occupation for the two years preceding the filing of the petition.

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 November 8, 1998. Therefore, the petitioner must establish that the beneficiary was continuously carrying on a religious occupation since at least November 8, 1996.

The petitioner submitted a letter from its Senior Pastor stating that the beneficiary "volunteered his services to [the petitioning church] as a religious educational director since early October 1996 to the present time. He has devoted between 25-35 hours per week."

The director concluded that a claim of voluntary service to one's church was insufficient to satisfy the requirement of having been continuously engaged in the religious occupation for the preceding two years.

The statute and its implementing regulations require that a beneficiary had been continuously carrying on the religious occupation specified in the petition for the two years preceding filing. Because the statute requires two years of continuous experience in the same position for which special immigrant classification is sought, the Bureau 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.

Here, the letter from the petitioning church's Senior Pastor unequivocally states that the petitioner has not paid the beneficiary for his services; rather, the beneficiary has volunteered his services. It cannot be concluded that the petitioner has overcome the director's concerns.

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.