



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

File: EAC-98-078-54783

Office: Vermont Service Center

Date:

AUG 15 2000

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:

Petition: Petition for Special Immigrant Religious Worker Pursuant to Section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. 1153(b)(4)

IN BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

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


Terrance M. O'Reilly, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

Public Copy

Identifying data deleted to
prevent clearly unwarranted
invasion of personal privacy

DISCUSSION: The immigrant visa petition was denied by the Director, Vermont Service Center. The matter 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), to serve as a music director. The director denied the petition determining that the petitioner had failed to establish that the prospective occupation is a religious occupation.

On appeal, counsel argues that the beneficiary is eligible for the benefit sought.

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, 2000, 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, 2000, 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 beneficiary is a thirty-four-year-old married female native and citizen of [REDACTED]. The petitioner indicated that the beneficiary

entered the United States as a visitor on [REDACTED] and that her authorized period of admission expired on [REDACTED]

At issue in the director's decision is whether the prospective occupation is a religious occupation.

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

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.

The regulation does not define the term "traditional religious function" and instead provides only a brief list of examples. The examples listed reflect that not all employees of a religious organization are considered to be engaged in a religious occupation. 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 of the denomination. The regulation reflects that nonqualifying positions are those whose duties are primarily administrative, humanitarian, or secular. 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.

In its letter dated January 13, 1998, the petitioner stated that the beneficiary:

received a Bachelor of Music Degree from [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] in [REDACTED] on February 26, 1988
... [Her] main responsibility as Music Director will be
to lead the church choir for various performances and

religious services. Among her other duties, she will be responsible for choosing the musical pieces which will be performed by the choir in services; conduct vocal rehearsals by parts (bass, alto, and soprano); leading group practices to harmonize pieces; coordinate vocal and musical ensembles (piano, violin, cello and Ka Ya Keum); and preparing the choir for exclusive performances given at other churches, religious associations, and/or special events.

The petitioner submitted a photocopy of the beneficiary's degree and transcript from [REDACTED]

On April 7, 1998, the director requested that the petitioner submit additional information. In response, the petitioner stated that "the person responsible for our Church choir and various productions must have proven his devotion to the Presbyterian Religion. The position requires an understanding of religious doctrines and ideas."

On appeal, counsel reiterates statements made previously by the petitioner. Counsel submits photocopies of several musical pieces and several letters from members of the congregation attesting to their belief that the beneficiary qualifies for the benefit sought.

The Service does not dispute that music plays an integral role in many religious services. This does not indicate, however, that the performance of musical duties at a church is equivalent to the performance of duties performed by one employed in a religious occupation. The petitioner has neither asserted nor documented that the beneficiary was required to undergo any religious training or theological education prior to qualifying for the position of music director. Rather, the petitioner has documented the beneficiary's studies in the field of music. There is no evidence that any member of the congregation possessing a musical talent would be unable to perform the prospective duties. Accordingly, the petitioner has failed to establish that the prospective occupation is a religious occupation.

Beyond the decision of the director, the petitioner has failed to establish the beneficiary's two years of continuous religious work experience as required at 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(1). Also, the petitioner has failed to establish that the beneficiary is qualified to work in a religious occupation as required at 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(3) or that it made a valid job offer to the beneficiary as required at 8 C.F.R. 204.5(m)(4). Further, the petitioner has failed to establish that it has the ability to pay the proffered wage as required at 8 C.F.R. 204.5(g)(2). As the appeal will be dismissed on the ground discussed, these issues 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. The petitioner has not sustained that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.