# Religious Worker (R) Visa

by Paul Anderson

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This visa is for foreign people who seeking admission to conduct religious worship and perform other duties usually performed by authorized members of the clergy of that religion. The main criterion in obtaining R visa is that one must have been a member of religious denomination having a bona fide nonprofit religious organization in US. The processing time is normally 2-4 months.

On R-1 Visa one can even study full time and receive money or payment for the service performed. If the employer petition one can even petition for Green Card. Principal applicant of the R1 Visa holder can bring in spouse and also unmarried children below 21 years of age under R-2 Visa as dependents. Dependents of the R-1 Visa are not allowed to work but allowed to study, given the financial support while in US.

Since R visa is an employer petition, employer must use Form I-129 (Petition of Nonimmigrant Worker). Until unless the petition is approved by either DHS or USCIS, the religious worker can not apply for visa at US Embassy or US Consulate.  Once the petition is approved, either the employer or the agent will receive Form I-797 (Notice of Action). Visa applicants should bring in the petition receipt number to the visa interview.  Through department of the Stateâ€™s Petition Information Management System (PIMS), the verification of the petition is done.  There is no guarantee if the petition is approved you will get the visa, they prove the ineligibility and give the reason for rejection.

Once visa is approved, R Visa holder can stay up to 30 months initially, which can be extend again for 30 month. It should not exceed more than 5 years. Changing of the employer is also allowed during the stay but the new petition need to be submitted by the new employer or organization by filing Form I-129, Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker.

Necessary document needed while submitting to obtain R Visa are:

- Proof you are working as minister of religion or involved in religious occupation for a non-profit organization which is exempted from tax.

- Proof that you have been member of religious organization for at least 2 years.

- Employer proof to support the applicant above the property line (such as bank statement).

- Any recommendation letters.

- Evidence that you are qualified to work in US.

- IRS proof of the tax exempt status of the organization in the US.

R visa holder can adjust the status to obtain Green Card. Later open ups a path to obtain Citizenship, one must file Form I-360 (Special Immigrant Petition) and later From I-485 to adjust the status.

Religious Vocation: Demonstration of a lifelong commitment for religious life. Ex: Nuns, Monks and religious brothers and sisters.

Religious Denomination: Doctrine and discipline in religious services and ceremonies.  Creed and worship in established places for worship.

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