

21 March 2020

Priests who have immigration concerns, here is what's happening:

USCIS CLOSURES. USCIS has closed local offices for the purposes of any in-person interviews or naturalization oath ceremonies. Most of our R-1 and permanent residence applications are unaffected by this since interviews are usually not required. Citizenship applications can be submitted and processed, although the interview and subsequent oath ceremony will be delayed.

USCIS DELAYS. We are also seeing all cases take longer to process, potentially in-part due to worker shortages at USCIS. This unfortunately may get worse before it gets better as the number of cases of COVID-19 increases.

STATE DEPARTMENT CLOSURES. The Department of State has closed most U.S. Embassies and Consulates throughout the world for the purposes of nonimmigrant and immigrant visa interviews and processing. There is no set end-date on this closure. **THIS MEANS ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO LEAVES THE US AND WILL NEED A NEW VISA TO RETURN MAY HAVE TO WAIT FOR A PERIOD OF MONTHS BEFORE RETURNING.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these impacts, here are some important recommendations.

REMAIN IN THE U.S. IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. International travel being limited so you could get stuck and unable to get a flight back to the U.S. Also, if you need to get a new visa in order to return to the US it is unclear when you'll be able to do so. We can extend and modify immigration status, establish permanent residence and citizenship from within the country.

FILE ANY PETITIONS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE ONCE YOU ARE ELIGIBLE. If you are eligible for residence, get it as soon as possible. Residence can be acquired within the U.S. and eliminate the need to get visas renewed at U.S. Embassies abroad. File any other petitions for immigration status extensions as early as possible.

Cases we file for new visas will continue to be processed by USCIS but it is not clear when the actual visa will be issued.

These recommendations are based on the current circumstances which can change. As always, if there is any doubt about an individual situation please contact me immediately.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Also, I want you to be aware that I am in contact with congressional offices as well as direct personal contacts at USCIS and the State Department. I am monitoring the situation closely and will keep you updated on any changes that may affect you.

Kind regards,

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