

Religious Green Card

The process of getting lawful permanent residency for religious workers is a little bit different from the process for other applicants. This page applies only to people who are already in the United States and will apply for lawful permanent residency or green cards here. This information does not apply to people who will process their status at a United States consulate abroad.

Before You Adjust Status

Make Sure Your Priority Date is Current

United States Immigration sets a limit of 5,000 religious worker immigrant visas available every federal fiscal year, which sometimes creates a backlog in the system. **Do not send your application before your priority date is current.** Checking priority dates is confusing, and if done incorrectly, it can put you in deportation. Please rely on the help of an experienced immigration attorney to determine when your priority date is current.

Understand When You Can Travel

As soon as you submit your application to adjust status, **you can no longer travel with your R-1 Nonimmigrant Religious Worker visa.** Here's why: if you received an R-1, you originally claimed that you did not intend to permanently come to the United States. However, when you send in your application to adjust status, you announce your intent to immigrate. You cannot intend to immigrate and not intend to immigrate at the same time. This means that there will be a gap of time in which you cannot travel.

If you have a genuine emergency, you can ask Immigration for an emergency travel permit, but even an emergency travel permit takes time. Don't plan any trips for the period of time immediately following your application submission. You will typically

have to wait three months before you can travel, but don't make plans until you have the physical copy of your work permit.

Coordinate with Your Work Permit

After you submit your application to adjust status, you will apply for a work permit, which will double as your permission to travel. As soon as you receive it, you may travel with your work permit and your passport.

Make sure you get your work permit before your R-1 Nonimmigrant Worker status expires. There are some special provisions for clergy if their R-1 expires before their work permit arrives, but you should talk to your attorney if your R-1 is about to expire.

In Wisconsin, you can also use your work permit to renew your driver's license if your license expires when your R-1 Nonimmigrant Religious Worker expires.

Make Sure Your Immigrant Visa is Available

The Religious Worker Immigrant visa for ordained clergy is slightly different from the immigrant visa for people in a lifelong vocation and those working in a professional capacity. The immigrant visa for ordained clergy is a permanent law. Whereas, Congress renews a temporary law every few years, instead of passing a permanent law, for immigrant visas for people in a lifelong vocation and those working in a professional capacity. But sometimes they don't renew the law before it expires. In other words, if the law expires, **there may be periods of time when Religious Worker Immigrant visas simply aren't available to people in a lifelong vocation and those working in a professional capacity.** Before you apply, make sure that the immigrant visa for people in a lifelong vocation and those working in a professional capacity is currently available.

Go to the Social Security Office

As soon as you get your lawful permanent resident card, you should take it to the social security office. Now that you are a lawful permanent resident, social security will remove the addendum across the top of your card that says, "Not valid without USDHS authorization."

Frequently Asked Questions

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How much does it cost to adjust status?

As of May 2019, the cost to adjust status is \$1,140, plus \$85 for biometrics. However, fees are subject to change with very little notice. If you want to know the current cost, check [the fee page at uscis.gov](#). You will also have other costs, such as getting a medical examination.

Is it typical for a sponsor or church to help fund their employee's green card?

Every denomination has its own policies as to what they will pay for and what they expect the religious worker to fund. Make sure you understand what your financial obligations are before you begin this process.

Will I ever have to go through consular processing?

If you are applying for your green card abroad, you will consular process in a U.S. consulate in your home country. However, if you are already in the United States when you apply for your green card, you will adjust status.

How long does it typically take to adjust status?

Some adjustments process quickly while others seem to take forever, and there doesn't seem to be a reason why. Don't panic if yours is taking longer than a friend or colleague's. You can check the [stated processing times](#) at uscis.gov. If your case is taking longer than the stated processing time, you can ask for something called a service request at [uscis.gov](#).

After I submit my application to adjust status, how long should I plan to wait before I can travel?

You should plan to wait at least three months to be safe, but that is no guarantee. Your work permit/travel document will not be issued until after your biometrics are completed.

Is it possible to lose my green card?

Yes, religious workers, like all immigrants, can become deportable.

How do I renew my green card?

Renewing your green card will be the same process regardless of the visa you used to obtain it. Learn more about this process on our [Green Card Renewal](#) page.

[Green Cards Immigration](#)

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