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Breaking Christian News Headlines

Pastor's wife who helped Chicago church community deported after 30 years in US

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The wife of a Chicago-area pastor who also works as a custodian at Moody Bible Institute was deported last month for overstaying her visa. Julita Bartolome had lived in the United States for over three decades and was seen as an integral part of her immigrant church community.

Bartolome was arrested in July after appearing for a meeting with federal immigration agents in Illinois, as reported by NPR's [WBEZ Chicago](#).

The hope for that meeting was for her to be able to apply to have her relationship with her husband, U.S. citizen Edgardo Bartolome, acknowledged by immigration officials so she could get a green card.

Instead, Bartolome spent over a month at the McHenry County Adult Correctional Facility and is now thousands of miles away from her family in her native Philippines, despite failed efforts from members of Congress to halt the deportation order.

Bartolome was put on a plane and flown to Manilla on Aug. 22. Now, she is outside the country with her family in the U.S. trying to apply for her to receive an immigrant visa, according to the family's lawyer, Katherine Del Rosario.

"This case is about a woman with no criminal history, and actually a very long history of benevolent volunteerism and involvement in her church and her community," Del Rosario said, according to NPR. "She's being sent back to a country that she hasn't called home for 30 years."

Bartolome arrived in the U.S. in 1988 when she came to work as a maid. And until 2000, she lived in Florida.

According to Del Rosario, Bartolome overstayed her visa and did not know how to navigate the U.S. immigration system. Additionally, she lacked access to a good lawyer because of financial troubles.

[NPR reports](#) that Bartolome (maiden name Julita Rafael) applied for asylum after her visa expired on grounds that she was fleeing from the Marcos regime like many other Filipinos during the 1980s. However, her application was denied and she was referred to an immigration court. She was later granted a voluntary departure from the U.S. and given a month to return to the Philippines.

Although she appealed her asylum rejection, her appeal was dismissed. Del Rosario says that Bartolome's lawyer at the time did not inform her that the appeal had been dismissed and that her removal order was still active.

Julita met Edgardo Bartolome and his two children after his first wife died of cancer in 2000. The couple later married and Julita Bartolome became a central part of their family unit and the church community at Immanuel Baptist Church in Chicago's Northwest side, where Bartolome pastored.

It was in 2002 that the Bartolomes filed a petition called an I-130 to have the government acknowledge that Julita Bartolome was in a familial relationship with a U.S. citizen, a status that allowed her to apply for legal status.

According to Del Rosario, the petition was approved at the time. However, the family was told that they had to wait 10 years for her to apply for legal status because she had an outstanding deportation order from decades ago when she was living in Florida.

In 2017, the family believed they had to refile for an I-130 to apply for a green card. It was after the I-130 meeting with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in July that Julita Bartolome was detained by agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

During her time at McHenry County Adult Correctional Facility, the family filed three requests for the stay of Bartolome's removal but those stays were rejected.

"Everything about her case is approvable except for the fact that she didn't get the right advice from the right people at the right time," Del Rosario told [WBEZ](#). "She tried her best for the last 20 years to gain legal status in the U.S."

Aaron Bartolome, Edgardo's son, told the news outlet that Julita Bartolome's deportation is having an impact on his father. He noted that she always helped her husband with all aspects of running the small immigrant congregation at Immanuel Baptist.

"They go together to minister to people, visit people in the hospital, counsel people, or lead Bible studies," Aaron Bartolome said. "And now my dad is planning to resign because he can't do these things without her."

Aaron Bartolome added that his stepmother's absence from the ministry was noticeable since she did so much work to help the immigrant women of the community. Also as a result of Julita Bartolome's absence, Aaron Bartolome has warned that his father has struggled emotionally and lost weight.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky and U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, both Democrats, also made attempts to halt Bartolome's deportation. However, those attempts were not successful.

Miguel Ayala, a spokesperson for Schakowsky, told WBEZ that Bartolome's deportation is "just an illustration of the topsy-turvy priorities of this Administration, to deport the 66-year-old wife of a pastor."

Del Rosario said she tried everything she could think of to get the authorities to ease up on its orders to remove Julita Bartolome. This includes multiple requests for stay and a request for the ICE Chief Counsel's office to review her case. To no avail, Del Rosario said she received an email on Aug. 21 explaining that Bartolome would be deported the next day.

"If [this Administration] is not going to exercise discretion on a person like this, who would they exercise discretion for?" Del Rosario argued.

President Donald Trump vowed earlier this summer to ramp up immigration raids in select cities, noting at the time that immigration agents would be "focused on criminals as much as we can before we do anything else."

While the Trump administration has taken a lot of criticism for its border and immigration policies, the number of people the administration has deported actually pales in comparison to the number of deportations that occurred during the early years of the Obama administration.

At its peak in 2012, the Obama administration deported over 407,000 people. In the fiscal year 2018, the Trump administration deported over 230,000 people.

However, immigration advocates contend that the Obama administration prioritized deportations of people convicted of serious crimes and recent arrivals rather than individuals who have been in the country for decades. Headlines were made earlier this summer when an Iraqi Catholic man from Michigan who came to the U.S. when he was 6 months old died after he was deported to Iraq.

The Obama administration also decreased the removal of immigrants living in the interior of the country, rather than near the borders. But under the Trump administration, interior removals have increased, according to data analyzed by the Cato Institute.

But even the Trump administration's over 81,000 interior removals in 2018 falls short of the 155,311 interior removals per year averaged during the eight years of the Obama administration.

Edgardo Bartolome was able to speak with his wife one last time through a video chat the day before she was deported. She advised him on the things she needed to pack for her trip to the Philippines. Aaron Bartolome said during the call that his stepmother had expressed concern about Edgardo Bartolome's appetite and health.

A GoFundMe page has been established to help the Bartolome family pay for legal fees. In over a week-and-a-half, over \$12,700 has been raised.