

With Deportation Ordered, Mexican Immigrant Seeks Refuge in Church Sanctuary

A Mexican immigrant who has lived illegally in the United States for more than a decade has taken refuge in an Arizona church after he was ordered deported, in a high-profile and highly personal challenge to U.S. immigration policy.

Daniel Neyoy Ruiz, 36, was ordered in April to report for voluntary deportation on Tuesday. He instead turned to a Tucson church whose leaders were once heavily involved in a movement to give sanctuary to refugees streaming to the country from wars in Central America in the 1980s.

"I'll do anything it takes to stay with my family," said Neyoy Ruiz, who has lived in the United States for 14 years and has a 13-year-old son who is a U.S. citizen.

Federal immigration officials have focused their efforts on stopping illegal border crossings and deporting unauthorized immigrants arrested for crimes.

Under pressure from groups who say too many non-violent immigrants are caught in the system, President Barack Obama is expected to announce revisions in the coming weeks to U.S. deportation policy.

Neyoy Ruiz is not the first immigrant to turn to a church for refuge from deportation. In 2006, Mexican immigrant activist Elvira Arellano famously entered a Chicago church and stayed there for a year, but was ultimately deported.

She has since returned to the United States and seeks to stay on humanitarian grounds.

Neyoy Ruiz and his wife came to the United States from Mexico

14 years ago. He was caught in a 2011 traffic stop when a police officer noticed smoke emerging from the back of his car and pulled him over, said his attorney Margo Cowan.

Unable to produce identification, Neyoy Ruiz was held for U.S. immigration authorities and spent a month in detention.

About a month ago, a letter arrived from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said Neyoy Ruiz, giving him 30 days to appear for voluntary deportation before midnight.

Fearing separation from his family, Neyoy Ruiz asked for help from Southside Presbyterian in Tucson and went to stay at the house of worship on Tuesday.

"The community was very moved by Daniel and the importance of protecting the unity of his family," said Reverend Alison Harrington, the church pastor.

An immigration spokeswoman said in an email on Tuesday the agency was "conducting a comprehensive review of Mr. Ruiz's case to determine appropriate next steps."

Ira Mehlman, a spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform which seeks to limit numbers entering the United States, criticized the church's action.

"Churches don't have the legal right or the moral authority to impact removal orders that have been handed down by the courts," he said.

Editing by Alex Dobuzinskis and Clarence Fernandez

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