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Chicago Area Local News 

Father Fights To Allow Son To Be Baptized

Victor Sarmiento Is Battling In Court With Soon-To-Be Ex-Wife

CHICAGO (CBS) — A man is taking his 3-year-old son's mother to court, seeking an order that will allow the son to be baptized in the Roman Catholic Church.

Victor Sarmiento, a veteran of the War in Afghanistan, is in the process of getting a divorce from his wife, Lizette Perez. Custody of their son is also pending.

Perez, whom attorneys believe is Pentecostal, does not take issue with Sarmiento taking their son to Catholic mass. But she has tried to keep Sarmiento from having their son baptized, said Sarmiento's attorney, Jeffrey Leving.

The brief hearing before Cook County Circuit Court Judge Marya Nega ended with a continuation to June 17, when Leving hopes a ruling will be issued.



"We are ready to litigate in pursuit of our client's right to freedom of religion," Leving said.

Sarmiento may also litigate for custody of the boy if an agreement cannot be reached, Leving said.

"The reality here is the focus is on the best interest of the child. We want to grow up with a religion, and my client wants that religion to be Catholicism, because my client was born Catholic, he was raised Catholic. He was raised Catholic. He has never converted," Leving said. "He's a practicing Catholic, and spiritually, it's very important to him for his 3-year-old to be baptized within the Catholic religion."

Sarmiento describes his son as "curious," and says he is trying to teach the boy about his faith.

"I told him about the Lord, and what we're doing is trying to teach him to kneel down and to pray for our family," Sarmiento said.

He expressed hope that the case would be resolved in his favor.

"There's always hope no matter what," he said. "When you're down and out, there's always hope somewhere."

Leving said while the boy's mother is believed to be Pentecostal, there is doubt as to whether Perez would raise the boy in any faith at all.

Sarmiento's case echoes another recent court battle between divorced parents over religion. Joseph Reyes of Chicago was found in criminal contempt of court in December, after taking his 3-year-old daughter to a Roman Catholic mass. As part of a divorce settlement with his ex-wife, Rebecca, Reyes was ordered not to expose his daughter to any religion other than Judaism.

But a judge later ruled that Reyes may take his daughter to Catholic services, even though her mother is raising her in the Jewish faith.

Leving said Sarmiento's case was different, both because custody is still at issue. Leving added that while Reyes converted to Judaism after his child was born, Sarmiento has always been Roman Catholic and has never left the church.

Sarmiento will return to court during Nega's 9:30 a.m. call June 17 at the Daley Center.



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