

A diocese's long journey to schism: San Joaquin defects from Episcopal Church

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Bishop John-David Schofield struck an urgent tone when he urged his Fresno-based San Joaquin diocese to defect from the Episcopal Church.

“God’s timing is essential,” he said before the overwhelming vote December 8 to cut ties with the American denomination and align with the Argentina-based Anglican Province of the Southern Cone. “Delayed obedience in scripture is seen as disobedience when opportunities and blessings are lost.”

But the historic action—San Joaquin is the first diocese to secede from the Episcopal Church and align with an overseas province—was a long time coming, Episcopalians say, and may take even longer to finally resolve. The dioceses of Fort Worth, Texas, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, are also close to leaving the denomination.

The dispute between San Joaquin and the Episcopal Church is longstanding. It predates the consecration of a gay bishop and the ordination of women in the 1970s, going back to the 1950s when liberal bishops were accused of questioning core tenets.

Battles in church and secular courts loom ahead, with fighting over millions of dollars in church property. “We really can’t put a time frame on anything,” said Charles Robertson, an adviser to Episcopal presiding bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. He reiterated the church’s position that individuals may leave but congregations and dioceses belong to the national church.

Jefferts Schori had said the diocese would continue “under new leadership,” which indicates that a new bishop will replace Schofield. At stake also is care for five parishes of the 47-congregation diocese that remain loyal to the national church.

The Episcopal News Service received word from a spokesperson for the Anglican Communion that Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, the communion's spiritual leader, "has not in any way endorsed the actions of the primate of the Southern Cone, Bishop Gregory Venables," to welcome dioceses such as San Joaquin.

One conservative priest, Van McCalister, said he expects no change for several years while legal issues are resolved. "I'm going back to work tomorrow, and I expect to walk into my office like it's business as usual," he said. -*Religion News Service*