

1,100 mile 'Camino' across Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin to focus on 'migrant, climate and racial justice'

by [David Paulsen](#)

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David Rice, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin, and Warren Starr, a member of St. James Cathedral in Fresno, California, lead the Pilgrimage of Hope's team of walkers in 2019. (Photo by Nelson Serrano)

Episcopalians in the [Diocese of San Joaquin](#) embarked April 22 on a 22-day tour of the central California diocese to draw awareness to the intersections of environmental disaster, racial discrimination, and migrant exploitation and to reckon with the diocese's own complicity in unjust systems.

The 1,100-mile pilgrimage—[El Camino de la Pascua](#), or the Way of Easter—is led by Bishop David Rice. He and the diocese’s group of pilgrims will travel by carpool and on foot to a wide range of sites that represent what the diocese describes as contemporary places of crucifixion and resurrection, from a homeless shelter to the Sequoia National Forest.

“Being out there engaging with partners and networks and becoming familiar with our larger context, it needs to be synonymous with the air that we breathe,” Rice said in a phone interview. “That is the road map and will continue to be the road map for this diocese for years to come.”

Each day of the journey will end with a stop at a host site, often one of the churches in the diocese, where pilgrims and members of the local community can share fellowship over a meal. Home stays and accommodations at churches have been arranged for participants who are spending multiple days on the journey, which began with visits to Manzanar, Owens Lake, and Ridgecrest.

Manzanar is home to a [national historic site](#) marking where the federal government established one of its internment camps to hold Japanese immigrants during World War II, an unjust system of detention that [later was ruled unconstitutional](#). Rice said such examples underscore that “we have places of oppression in our context, places of our making that we have either been unaware of . . . due to our past or we have chosen to be unaware.”

The Fresno-based Diocese of San Joaquin was [created in 1910](#) by a division of the Diocese of California. It was one of a handful of dioceses that succumbed to schism in the 2000s over theological divides related to the ordination of women and openly gay and lesbian clergy. In December 2006, San Joaquin became the first Episcopal diocese in which leaders [voted to sever ties](#) with the Episcopal Church.

Rice was elected in 2014 as the diocese’s fourth provisional bishop, and in 2017, the diocese chose him as its [first diocesan bishop since the schism](#). San Joaquin now has 19 faith communities and operates the Episcopal Conference Center at Oakhurst.

The Camino de la Pascua is just the latest example of Episcopalians in the diocese witnessing to their faith by organizing extended pilgrimages through their communities. The [Tour Against Trafficking](#), a 763-mile bicycle trek in 2015, sought to raise money and awareness for the fight against human trafficking. And in 2019, Rice led a 17-day [Pilgrimage of Hope](#), in which participants walked the 200 miles

from Fresno to the state's capital, Sacramento, to advocate for solutions to the plight of California's immigrants.

This year, the 1,100-mile journey around the diocese will focus more broadly on the theme of "migrant, climate and racial justice for all" with the backing of the three diocesan commissions that address those issues. About 20 people signed up for all of the pilgrimage or multi-day segments, and others are expected to join on certain days. Stops will include food banks, medical clinics, and community gardens.

From inhumane conditions at detention facilities to the ever-present threat of wildfires, participants on the pilgrimage hope to hear firsthand how such issues are affecting the people and communities across the diocese. Anna Carmichael, San Joaquin's canon to the ordinary, emphasized that the goal is not to swoop in presuming that the church has all the answers.

"We're really here to be receptors, to be sponges, to learn as much as we can and take that learning and continue putting it forward in action and in justice work that we're doing," she said, "so that it has meaning for what we do every day of the week, and that we aren't just faithful Christians and Episcopalians on Sunday."

Given how significant the agricultural industry is California's Central Valley, Rice said he is looking forward to speaking with farm laborers and learning about their working conditions. "These farm workers basically power this economy and provide food for tables around the world," Rice said. "They've been unknown to this diocese."

The pilgrimage also will raise money for [UFW Foundation](#), a farm worker engagement organization, as well as [Sequoia Riverlands Trust](#), and the [Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing](#).

On April 27, the pilgrimage will include a stop at a private detention center in McFarland where immigrants are held awaiting court hearings. "We as the diocese have not always stood up and called for justice in those places, better sanitation, better food quality, basic human rights," Carmichael said. A vigil is planned outside the McFarland facility, and organizers will attempt to reach one of the detainees by phone to speak directly to the conditions of detention.

It will conclude on May 13 with visits to an International Rescue Committee office in Turlock and a Hmong community garden in Merced. —Episcopal News Service