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Catholic sisters take part in a Jericho Walk, a ritual addressing issues such as racism, violence and climate change, as part of the LCWR assembly Aug. 14 in Orlando, Florida. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)



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Hundreds of Catholic sisters took part in a solemn walk Aug. 14 to lament, pray for and advocate on issues including forced migration, racism and climate change.

Called a Jericho Walk, the ritual involves song, prayer and silence and is a form of nonviolent public witness rooted in the Old Testament, named for the biblical story of Joshua marching seven times around the walled city of Jericho.

The event was part of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' annual assembly, which has drawn more than 1,300 leaders of religious congregations and their guests. The assembly runs Aug. 11-14; LCWR represents about two-thirds of the nearly 35,000 Catholic sisters in the United States.

"Jericho Walks have been held around prisons, detention centers, where violence has happened in cities and in places where injustice is present," LCWR Executive Director Carol Zinn told participants. "Today, we are creating a centerpiece which names and laments the injustice we seek to address."

Each circuit addressed an issue such as human dignity, racism, violence, poverty and the right to vote. Between each circuit, sisters prayed the Litany of Saints.

"Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love," sisters prayed, their walk punctuated by the sound of a drum. "As Catholic sisters we are committed to the precepts of social teaching rooted in the Catholic tradition that remind us that the dignity of the person is at the core of our moral vision of society; that how we organize our society affects human dignity directly; and that any system that is deliberately cruel or inhumane needs to change."



A sister sounds a horn as part of the Jericho Walk at the LCWR assembly Aug. 14 in Orlando, Florida. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)

The circuit addressing forced migration called on leaders to bring fundamental change.

"We call upon Congress and the administration to address the root causes of forced migration and to join with the international community and partners in the Americas to fashion a regional response to what is clearly a regional crisis," the sisters prayed.

The circuit focused on ending violence restated LCWR's solidarity with the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR), one of the many groups invited to the assembly, as so many Latin American countries have or continue to suffer from violence, often state-sanctioned.

"Violence and war do not bring peace; they deepen suffering, destabilize nations and place the most vulnerable at greatest risk," they prayed.

When sisters walked the circuit dedicated to ending racism, they called for the establishment of a truth commission in the United States "to examine the effects of slavery, institutional racism, and discrimination against people of color, and how our history impacts laws and policies today," to protect and extend voting rights, and to study possible reparations, including any form of apology and compensation, for slavery "to begin the long-delayed process of atonement."

As the ritual finished, participants pledged "to live our call to be courageous witnesses of love — refusing to surrender our moral authority or succumb to despair."

The walk had been planned to take place outside the hotel, but officials were unable to secure the needed permits, so the circuits took place around the pool area. Sisters were able to register and then walk and log their distances on their own all week; as of the morning of Aug. 14, they had logged more than 500 miles.

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