

# Renovated Crystal Cathedral to be place of Catholic worship

Anyone who remembers the Crystal Cathedral from the days of Rev. Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" television ministry will do a double take when the doors reopen on July 17.

A new stone altar has been placed near the center of the building. Above it is a huge *baldachin* (canopy) from which hangs a striking crucifix of wood, marble and brass. A bishop's *cathedra* (chair) will be prominent in the redesigned sanctuary.

"What we really had to establish was this as a Catholic place of worship," said Father Christopher H. Smith, the episcopal vicar and rector of the soon-to-be dedicated Christ Cathedral, the new spiritual center of the Diocese of Orange, California.

## Anticipation and celebration

Excitement slowly has been building since Bishop Kevin Vann of Orange called for a special year of anticipation and celebration, which began on June 29, 2018. The year will solemnly draw to a close with the dedication of Christ Cathedral.

"It is my prayer that folks will see this gift of God, which is given to us. It's not just for us, but it's for the ages," Bishop Vann said in a video on the new cathedral parish website, which has been posting updates on the yearslong project to transform what was a prominent Protestant house of worship into a space where the Eucharist will be celebrated.

"It's really the fulfillment of our dream for the campus ever since we purchased it," said Father Smith, who has overseen

the development of Christ Cathedral's 34-acre campus, which includes the Tower of Hope and the arboretum, the space that originally housed Schuller's Garden Grove Community Church.

## **Diocesan growth**

Father Smith told Our Sunday Visitor that the dedication of the Christ Cathedral is an important milestone in the short history of the Diocese of Orange, which was created in 1976 from territory that used to be in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. In 43 years, the diocese has grown from 44 parishes and 300,000 Catholics to 62 parishes and missions and more than 1.6 million Catholics.

With that kind of demographic growth – making the Diocese of Orange the seventh largest in the United States – the local church long ago outgrew Holy Family Cathedral, a church building with a capacity of just over 800 people.

In comparison, the renovated Christ Cathedral will have seating for about 2,250 people with an outdoor space capable of seating as many as 20,000 individuals for major liturgies and other celebrations.

Since 2013, the downtown St. Callistus Church has been using the Christ Cathedral campus arboretum – which has a capacity of 1,200 – for its weekend Masses. Every weekend about 10,000 people attend the 12 Masses there, which are celebrated in four languages.

“This is the fulfillment of a dream where we will not only have a center for the diocese in terms of the physical buildings, but also that we will have a cathedral building that represents the unity of the Diocese of Orange in the name of the bishop,” Father Smith said.

In 2005 the diocese purchased land in Santa Ana and planned to launch a capital campaign to build a new cathedral from the ground up. But around that same time, the board of the former

Crystal Cathedral declared bankruptcy after citing nearly \$50 million in debt.

## **Renovation**

The opportunity to purchase Crystal Cathedral from bankruptcy proceedings provided the Diocese of Orange with a timely, even providential, development, given the building's central location and size. The \$77 million price tag of extensively renovating Crystal Cathedral was also far less than the cost of constructing new facilities, officials said.

"When we purchased the campus, one of the things we agreed to was in the renovation of the interior of the buildings, that we would not change anything in terms of the exterior," Father Smith said.

"It's been a challenge but also has been a great thing, because it's really preserved the look of the campus that it's had over all the years, and we really made an attempt of the architectural style to maintain the integrity of their style, even on the interior renovations that we have made," Father Smith added.

When it was completed in 1981, the Crystal Cathedral was touted as "the largest glass building in the world" with more than 10,000 rectangular panes of glass used in the construction. Schuller, who founded the Garden Grove Community Church with his wife in 1955, had envisioned a unique facility with walls made of glass.

In addition to Christ Cathedral, the arboretum and Tower of Hope, the campus includes galleries, the Crean Tower, the Diocese of Orange Pastoral Center and Cathedral Cultural Center. The 320,000-square-foot campus also has a cemetery, memorial gardens, natural landscapes, fountains and sculptures that surround the main cathedral building.

Those who remember Schuller's televised "Hour of Power" from

the Crystal Cathedral will recognize the Hazel Wright Memorial Organ, one of the largest musical instruments in the world. The organ was restored in Italy and will be installed in the coming weeks. It will not be ready for the July 17 dedication.

“The building looks very different on the inside than it did before,” said Father Smith, who added that a new baptistery, reconciliation chapels and a Blessed Sacrament chapel had to be built. A new stone wall also encircles the whole interior to give the worship space a more intimate feel.

In addition, the glass panes are now covered with heat-deflecting quatrefoils, which are like window shades made of plastic and fabric that control lighting, temperature and acoustics, as well as providing a handy perch to hang lighting.

“They’re absolutely stunning now that they’re in. They create this quality of light as I have never seen anything like it in any building,” Father Smith said. “You walk into the cathedral and your eyes will move to the ceiling. It’s really like a heavenly gaze.”

## **Campus for everybody**

The night before the dedication Mass, the diocese will host an evening prayer service for veneration of the relics that will be placed under the cathedral’s main altar. The next day, there will be an evening prayer ceremony of thanksgiving.

“This campus is for everybody,” Father Smith said. “Through this campus, we will invite all people to experience the love of Christ, and that means all people, no matter what background people have.”

The capital campaign behind renovating Christ Cathedral – the first such campaign in the diocese’s history – raised more than \$100 million toward renovations of the cathedral building and campus, as well as money to support Catholic schools,

local parishes and retired priests.

The diocesan campaign was named “For Christ Forever,” based on something that Schuller, who died in 2015, said about his future hopes for the cathedral.

“He said to me, ‘I built the cathedral for Christ. I always wanted it to be for Christ, and I know that with the Catholic Church, it will be a place for Christ forever,’” Father Smith said. “We thought that was beautiful, so that’s what we decided to name the capital campaign.”

*Brian Fraga is a contributing editor for Our Sunday Visitor.*

<b>The televangelist Rev. Robert Schuller</b>
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American televangelist Rev. Robert Schuller is most known for the "Hour of Power" television program that he hosted from 1970-2010. He was the founder of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California.

A native of Newkirk, Iowa, Schuller was raised in the Reformed Church. Just before his fifth birthday, Schuller was encouraged by an uncle who was a minister to be an evangelist. Schuller attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and received a master of divinity degree from Western Theological Seminary.

Here are some highlights about his church ministry:

- He was ordained as a minister in the Reformed Church of America in 1950.
  - His first church was in Riverdale, Illinois.
  - He opened the Garden Grove Community Church in Garden Grove, California, in 1955. The church was located in a drive-in movie theater.
- He rented a 300-seat former Baptist church a few miles from the drive-in theater and held services in the chapel at 9:30 a.m., then offered another service at the drive-in.
- In 1961, a church designed by Richard Neutra was dedicated.
  - The Tower of Hope building, which rose 13 stories on the north side of the drive-in church, was added in 1968. Schuller purchased 10 additional acres that bordered the north side of the church.
  - In 1980, the Crystal Cathedral, designed by architect Philip Johnson, was dedicated.