

Redesigned Christ Cathedral: 'You'll be able to see it from a long, long way'

By [CHRIS HAIRE](#) | chaire@scng.com | Long Beach Press-Telegram
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GARDEN GROVE – Ceiling lights that mimic stars.

Dozens of crape myrtle trees.

A rebuilt organ.

Those are some of the elements included in the restoration of Christ Cathedral, according to plans announced Wednesday by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange and its architects.

Officials said their goal is to turn the 35-acre campus into a center of Catholic life that blends both traditional design elements and modern architecture.

Plans for phase one of the restoration, which took a year to develop, also will include panels that somewhat shade the glass cathedral and a recreational lawn at the corner of Chapman Avenue and Lewis Street that will be big enough to hold 6,000 to 8,000 people for outdoor Mass.

The plan also includes a nod to the Rev. Robert Schuller, who made the former Crystal Cathedral campus famous through his "Hour of Power" television ministry. It will include statuary in Schuller's honor enclosed by a wall composed of replicas of the 1,800 memorial stones of the Walk of Faith from Schuller's era.

The entire campus renovation, including a second phase, could cost as much as \$113 million.

“This will be a center of gathering for Catholics and a center of gathering for everyone,” said the Rev. Christopher Smith, the rector and episcopal vicar of Christ Cathedral.

“We have come up with designs that will meet that goal of being a center of unity for the diocese.”

The diocese has \$53 million allocated to these specific projects and others, including \$29 million for the cathedral. It hopes to raise an addition \$60 million for other improvements.

Among the already designed features of phase one, expected to be completed in early 2017:

BOX OF STARS

The transformation is centered around the most iconic aspect of the campus, the 78,000-square-foot glass cathedral.

The 10,000 glass panes – which create excessive heat and light and bad acoustics – will be accentuated with new, white panels, called petals, that will open at varying degrees.

From the outside, the building will still look like a glass cathedral. But from inside, worshipers will see slivers of light, not a full view of the outside world. The idea is to keep worshipers focused on the altar.

The petals also will have outside lights, creating an effect the design committee calls the Box of Stars.

“One of the problems with the cathedral is that at night it just disappears,” said Rob Neal, chairman of the Architecture and Renovation Committee for Christ Cathedral. “These lights will illuminate the cathedral. ... You’ll be able to see it from a long, long way.”

CONCENTRIC SACREDNESS

Some elements of the new design are intended to be symbolic.

Visitors walking from the campus' parking area will pass through an enclosure of crape myrtle trees as they enter the plaza. Plans call for 272 of the trees, which are meant to symbolize the beginning, in earnest, of a gradual increase in holiness. The goal is for that feeling to reach a crescendo at the altar at the center of Christ Cathedral.

"The cathedral is the most sacred place on the campus," said Frank Clementi, a principal architect. "And the sacredness is distributed out from there. Think of it as a sacred heat map."

HAZEL WRIGHT ORGAN

The cathedral organ, which will be the second largest inside a Catholic church in the world, is still undergoing its \$2 million restoration.

Some of that work is being done in Italy.

Diocese officials say the organ restoration is on pace to be installed and tuned in time for the campus' official dedication in 2017.

There will be some changes.

The organ's faded walnut facade was too prominent; it would have distracted from the altar.

So the facade will be painted white so it blends into the surroundings. The sound will be improved.

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