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Diocese picks contractor for Christ Cathedral's \$72 million reconstruction project



Bishop of Orange Kevin Vann blesses Christ Cathedral as he walks the perimeter of the sanctuary space in Garden Grove on Saturday, February 11, 2017. The ceremony marks the start of the construction inside the cathedral. (Photo by Paul Rodriguez, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **DEEPA BHARATH** | dbharath@scng.com | Orange County Register

The iconic glass sanctuary built by the late Rev. Robert H. Schuller is a step closer to morphing into a Roman Catholic cathedral — one the county's Catholics hope will stand as a beacon for the faithful around the country.

On Tuesday, May 23, the Most Rev. Kevin Vann, Bishop of the Diocese of Orange, will sign a contract with Irvine-based construction firm Snyder Langston, which will take on [the cathedral's massive reconstruction project that is expected to cost about \\$72.3 million](#). The construction company's contract is valued at about \$45 million.

The signing ceremony inside the sanctuary will be followed by a carillon concert and Eucharist procession.

Construction on the project is set to begin June 1, said John Rochford, Snyder Langston's president and chief operating officer.

"It is truly prestigious for an Orange County construction firm like us to have an opportunity to build a cathedral in our backyard," he said. "You build hotels and resorts, but nothing matches building a cathedral. It would be quite an achievement for us."

Rochford said he is a practicing Catholic as are many members of his firm, which makes the project even more special for them.

The project would employ sub-contractors and hundreds of workers including stone masons, carpenters and electricians, he said. The biggest challenge, Rochford said, is to ensure worker safety as they operate high above the ground installing everything from the ceiling and air conditioning to lights and other fixtures.

The sanctuary's ceiling is at a height of 127 feet, which means it's taller than a 12-story building.

“When you’re working at that height for a long period of time, things can get complicated,” Rochford said. “That’s why we are making sure we have a comprehensive safety plan and working with sub-contractors to ensure all workers are properly trained for the job.”

When the sanctuary is ready for dedication by early 2019, it will be bathed in white, air-conditioned for comfort, and the entire floor covered with travertine tiles, said Richard Heim, special adviser on the construction project.

In September, the [diocese unveiled a design plan](#) for the sanctuary’s transformation into a Catholic worship space, with white as the dominant color, a lighted altar in the center, the bishop’s chair, baptismal font and shrines for Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of La Vang, a Marian apparition believed to have blessed persecuted Catholics in Vietnam during the turn of the 19th century.

The refurbished Hazel Wright organ is being stored in a warehouse and will be installed once construction is completed.

The Orange Catholic Foundation, the diocese’s fundraising arm, launched a campaign in 2012 titled “For Christ Forever Capital Campaign” to raise money for the cathedral renovation. The \$72.3 million price tag was significantly trimmed from more than \$100 million under Vann’s direction.

Heim said Snyder Langston was chosen because of its reputation in the construction industry and the firm’s strong relationships with sub-contractors.

The excitement over the cathedral in the community is palpable, Heim said.

“The diocese is now moving ahead with the centerpiece of its investment in Orange County,” he said. “It’s going to be a unique cathedral.”

Vann will sign the contract during the ceremony at 11:30 a.m. Tuesday, May 23 at the Christ Cathedral sanctuary, 13280 Chapman Ave. in Garden Grove.

Construction timeline

June 1: Construction scheduled to begin on the Christ Cathedral main sanctuary.

Fall 2018: Construction of the sanctuary to be completed. The Hazel Wright organ is expected to be installed after construction is finished; the organ installation could take up to six months.

Early 2019: The remodeled Christ Cathedral is set to be dedicated.

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Deepa Bharath

Deepa Bharath covers religion for The Orange County Register and the Southern California Newspaper Group. Her work is focused on how religion, race and ethnicity shape our understanding of what it is to be American and how religion in particular helps influence public policies, laws and a region's culture. Deepa also writes about race, cultures and social justice issues. She has covered a number of other beats ranging from city government to breaking news for the Register since May 2006. She has received fellowships from the International Women's Media Foundation and the International Center for Journalists to report stories about reconciliation, counter-extremism and peace-building efforts around the world. When she is not working, she loves listening to Indian classical music and traveling with her husband and son.

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