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# Its remodel underway, Christ Cathedral will look the same — except inside



Robert Tovar works on installing one of the 11,000 quatrefoils, which are four lobed ornamental designs, on the inside of the windows at Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove on Friday, June 29, 2018. The panels will serve to lower the temperature in the building. (Photo by Paul Bersebach, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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GARDEN GROVE — Outside, in defiance of its serene backdrop, a jackhammer thunders away. Sparks flare from a power saw as it ear-piercingly grinds through steel.

Inside, sounds of construction echo through a cavernous space that is at once familiar and disorienting – with flooring uprooted, seats gone and tall scaffolding everywhere.

The famous glass structure, built four decades ago as the Crystal Cathedral, is undergoing its transformation into Christ Cathedral – center of Catholicism in Orange County.

“I like to think of it as our downtown,” said the Rev. Christopher H. Smith, rector. “Cathedrals have always been the center of the city, not just for religious purposes but for serving the community as a whole.”

On Friday, June 29, Bishop Kevin Vann led a noon mass to commemorate the upcoming “year of preparation.” The cathedral will not officially be a cathedral until its dedication, scheduled for July 17, 2019.

Meanwhile, services are held in a less spectacular hall on the 34-acre campus.

In 2012, two years after the Rev. Robert H. Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral Ministries filed for bankruptcy, the Diocese of Orange purchased the Garden Grove site for \$57.5 million.

[The \\$72.3 million renovation project began last summer with seismic retrofitting, installation of air conditioning, fountain repairs and other improvements.](#)

For months, a demolition team has been stripping the 12-story-high, 45,000-square-foot building of its past identity.

As deconstruction comes to a close, the second half of the task begins – reconstruction. At this very moment, marble flooring is crossing the ocean from Italy.

“We have about 125 workers here daily, including weekends, to stay on schedule,” said Eric Flynn, construction manager.

Ultimately, the exterior will look the same as it did before, said spokesman Ryan Lilyengren.

“It’s an archaeologically acclaimed building,” Lilyengren said. “The historic shell of the original Crystal Cathedral will be maintained and restored.”

However, Catholic and Protestant facilities have different needs and functions, he said.

A "Bishop's Door," for instance, traditionally provides entrance into a Roman Catholic cathedral. Two 20-foot-tall bronze doors will comprise it, replacing the Crystal Cathedral's glass doors.

Catholic cathedrals also feature baldachins, centerpieces designed to draw attention. At Christ Cathedral, a metallic baldachin and a carved crucifix will hover 30 feet above the altar.

Oak pews surrounding the altar will seat about 2,000 visitors.

One thing that stays: the Crystal Cathedral's 16,000-piece pipe organ, currently under restoration. "It's one of the largest in the world," Lilyengren said. "Organ geeks even have a Facebook page for it."

Most iconic, the "crystal" that formed the Crystal Cathedral lives on – albeit in appearance only.

Each of the 12,000 panes of glass has been painstakingly shaded with a set of four "quatrafoils" – metal triangles individually angled to allow in just the right amount of light.

Anyone who sat sweltering through a Crystal Cathedral service on a summer day can remember how the flat glass panels invited relentless sunbeams.

Appointed as Christ Cathedral's rector in 2012, Smith has overseen every step of the remodel – starting with raising funds to accomplish it.


"People have been so generous," he said. "I'm in awe for two reasons – first because of what we're doing, and second because we're able to do it."

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## Susan Christian Goulding

After majoring in journalism at the University of Texas, Susan Christian Goulding got her start as a copy editor and reporter at the (late, great) Los Angeles Herald Examiner. She then worked at the (late, great) Santa Monica Outlook and the Daily Breeze as a features editor, writer and columnist. She moved to the Orange County bureau of the Los Angeles Times as a features and business writer. After that five-year stint, she worked as a correspondent for People magazine and a regular freelancer for Readers Digest while raising her two kids, Erin and Matt. During this time, she also wrote a weekly column for the Daily Breeze. Next, she gave up all possibility of free time and earned a teaching credential and masters at UCI. She taught English for four often rewarding and always challenging years in Compton, then at LMU and El Camino College. Missing journalism, Goulding circled back to her original career last year, joining the Orange County Register as a reporter. She also enjoys her return to column writing for the newspaper's OC Home magazine.

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