

# Christ Cathedral — a jewel box of artwork and hidden treasures — ready for grand opening

[Susan Christian Goulding](#) July 10, 2019 at 10:49 am



The newly remodeled Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove on Monday, July 8, 2019. One of the new features of the cathedral is the heat-controlling quatrefoils that cover the 11, 000 panes of glass. The official dedication of Christ Cathedral will be on Wednesday, July 17. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

First off, a visitor to Christ Cathedral might notice the new house smell, with everything fresh and pristine and scarcely touched by anyone other than construction workers.

But that fleeting sensation will be quickly replaced by visual surprises – especially noticeable for those somewhat familiar with the landmark in its former incarnation.

## 1 of 27

The sun breaks through the quatrefoils attached to the 11,000 panes of glass at Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove on Monday, July 8, 2019. The Crux Gemmeta (cross with Jesus' body), right, hangs from the baldachin and is made from blackened steel, weighs 1000-lbs and is cross typical of early medieval art. The official dedication of Christ Cathedral will be on Wednesday, July 17. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz, Orange County Register/SCNG)

High overhead, the ["quatrefoils" – eye-catching window shades now covering each of the 11,000 glass panes](#) – cast muted sunlight on the white marble floor. Walnut pews form a semi-circle around the altar, above which a 1,000-pound jeweled crucifix dangles. Stunning art abounds on every wall.

Yet the decor feels understated and the 45,000-square-foot space strikingly intimate. Somehow, the configuration of seating, now down from 2,700 spots to 2,100, makes Christ Cathedral seem smaller than it was as Crystal Cathedral.

On Wednesday, July 17, the new seat of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange will be officially dedicated in an invitation-only ceremony. Public viewing will take place that day from 5 to 8 p.m.

Then, the following weekend, the cathedral begins mass in the famous glass tower. Until then, services will continue to take place in a large hall on the 34-acre campus.

All who have witnessed the transformation – priests, nuns, staff, donors – are abuzz with excitement about the cathedral's grand opening.

The multiple choirs, composed of singers in four languages, came together to practice as one on Monday night, July 8. Their 230 voices, accompanied by horns, bells and kettledrums, filled the nine-story room.

"It's challenging to make it sound smooth and not just like the U.N.," said John Romeri, director of music.

Next Wednesday, the choir will introduce a trove of newly translated psalms set to music commissioned for the dedication, Romeri said.

Outside, the 120-foot-tall structure appears the same as it did when it debuted in 1980 under the stewardship of the Rev. Robert H. Schuller – who broadcast his renowned "Hour of Power" to millions worldwide from the Garden Grove megachurch.

In 2012, two years after Crystal Cathedral Ministries filed for bankruptcy, the Diocese of Orange purchased the site for \$57.5 million.

Five years later, in 2017, [the \\$72.3 million renovation](#) broke ground with seismic retrofitting. The cathedral is designed to withstand a magnitude 8 earthquake.

"It seems like the project has taken a long while, but then again not," said Bishop Kevin Vann, who leads the Diocese of Orange. "Once it got going, it moved quickly,"

Every time he steps into the remodeled cathedral, Vann said, he still is awed: "I just love how the quatrefoils cast lights on the floor."

Practical as well as aesthetic, the variously angled quatrefoils serve to deflect UV rays. Back in the days of the Crystal Cathedral, which lacked air-conditioning, guests could find themselves baking under unmitigated sunlight.

Fourteen illustrations of the “stations of the cross,” created by Bolivian sculptor Pablo Eduardo, line the walls. Each bas relief bronze sculpture is a work of art, with three-dimensional hands and faces emerging from the surface.

A 32-foot-long tapestry and an equally impressive mosaic made of tiny tiles add bright colors to the otherwise earth-tone space.

The cathedral also harbors hidden treasures – some 300 of them beneath the marble floor. Before the tiles were installed, Bishop Timothy Freyer revealed, a slew of folks – including Christ Cathedral Academy school children – wrote prayers and their names on the bare cement.

“I’m somewhere over there,” Freyer said, pointing toward the altar area.

Sister Katherine Gray said Christ Cathedral pays tribute to its history.

“The Rev. Schuller proclaimed Christ as we proclaim Christ,” she said. “The renovation preserves the modern architecture of the original church. This isn’t a medieval cathedral – it is a cathedral for Orange County.”