

# Thousands attend dazzling dedication of remodeled Christ Cathedral, Orange County's new center of Catholicism

[Susan Christian Goulding](#) July 17, 2019 at 10:10 pm



Bishop Kevin Vann performs the Anointing of the Alter with oil during the Christ Cathedral Solemn Mass of Dedication in Garden Grove, CA on Wednesday, July 17, 2019. More than 2,000 guests attended the event that marked the opening of the new home of the Diocese of Orange. (Photo by Paul Bersebach, Orange County Register/SCNG)











## 1 of 69

Guests attend the Christ Cathedral Solemn Mass of Dedication on Wednesday July 17, 2019, in Garden Grove. Over 2000 people attended the dedication. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)

Orange County added a new page to its history with the dedication Wednesday, July 17, of Christ Cathedral – not only a center of Catholicism but an architectural wonder, as well.

At the start of the four-hour service, Kevin Vann, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange, assumed guardianship in a ceremonial “handing over of the building” by those in charge of its renovation.

In that brief exchange, the Southern California landmark officially became the area’s cathedral – replacing Orange-based Holy Family, which had served as the mother church since the diocese’s establishment in 1976.



Vann and the Rev. Christopher Smith, rector for Christ Cathedral, took turns presenting the inaugural homily. "This is testimony that we, like this building, are open to being transformed," Smith said.

Indeed, the seven-story glass tower has undergone quite a transformation, although the changes aren't visible on the outside.

The Garden Grove mega-church opened 40 years ago as the Crystal Cathedral, led by worldwide televangelist Robert H. Schuller.

When Schuller's Crystal Cathedral Ministries filed for bankruptcy in 2010, the fate of the impressive monument off Chapman Avenue became a question mark. After two years of suspense, the Diocese of Orange purchased the 34-acre campus for \$57.5 million – then spent another \$72.3 million on remodeling.

Comfort-wise, the most welcome change is the addition of air conditioning and [heat-deflecting screens](#). Shading each of the 11,000 window panes, "quatrefoils" give the space an ethereal feel.

However, for a religion steeped in ritual, the most sacred task was [remaking a Protestant church into a Catholic place of worship](#). That meant adding such features as the 20-foot-tall bronze "Bishop's Doors," a centerpiece called a baldachin and a 1,000-pound jeweled crucifix. [Walnut pews and marble floors contribute to the splendor](#).

"It's spectacular, phenomenal, more than anything I could have imagined," said Mary Faley, 56, a teacher in Orange. "Robert Schuller is here in spirit, smiling down on us."

As an example of the cathedral's multiculturalism, various choirs sang as one in four languages – accompanied by a stirring orchestral performance.

"It sounds like a Broadway musical," Faley noted.

About 3,000 visitors attended the invitation-only debut – including priests and congregants representing the 62 parishes in Orange County. Overflow from the 2,200-seat cathedral spilled into an adjacent building.

Some expressed thrill and amazement that they managed to secure entrance.

"I still don't know how I got so lucky," enthused Garden Grove resident Rose Anguili, 80, who volunteers at St. Hedwig in Los Alamitos. "My pastor got to invite a few people, and he invited me."

Echoing her sentiment, Sergio Torres, 49, a construction worker in Anaheim, said, "It's hard to believe I'm here. I've never seen or done anything like this before."

Ed Leaverton, 76, a contractor in Yorba Linda, recalled sweating through a July wedding at Crystal Cathedral years ago. "They have done just an amazing job with the renovation," he said. "I've been to cathedrals all over Europe, and this is one of the most beautiful."

For Betty Cotton, 80, of Cypress, the cathedral's dedication offered a moment to reflect on commonalities rather than differences.

"It draws so many cultures together at a time when there is such division," said the retired real estate agent.

"I've heard people say, 'All that money spent on the cathedral could have gone to the homeless.' I understand their concern," Cotton said. "But this is a gathering spot where everyone is welcome, whoever you are, whatever neighborhood you live in, however much money you make, whatever your background. Here, we honor Jesus' two greatest commandments: Love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself."

Christ Cathedral will be open for mass on weekends. On weekdays, services will take place in the adjacent Christ Cathedral Arboretum for about a year

while the 16,000-pipe organ is tuned.