

Hallelujah, Amen!

A CATHEDRAL TRANSFORMATION

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The last four years have witnessed one of the great transformations of a cathedral space in all of history, taking a giant California mega-church and turning it into a Roman Catholic Cathedral. This was not just any space but a space known to people around the world, even though most had never entered it. It was the Rev. Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral. At its height, his "Hour of Power" television show was seen by 50 million viewers each week worldwide. The sanctuary was home to thousands of Southern Californians but was also a familiar worship space to millions around the world.

Its organ is iconic, affectionately known as "Hazel." The Hazel Wright organ is one of the largest pipe organs in the world. It was made

possible by a significant donation from Mrs. Hazel Wright, a regular viewer of the "Hour of Power." The organ was built by Fratelli Ruffatti on a design by Virgil Fox, using the 100-rank Aeolian Skinner organ from Philharmonic Hall in New York City and the 115-rank Ruffatti organ installed in 1977 into the Sanctuary of the Garden Grove Community Church, the predecessor congregation of the Crystal Cathedral, designed by American architect Richard Neutra. Ruffatti also added additional ranks to the organ at that time. The instrument was dedicated in 1982 and was further enlarged during the sixteen-year tenure of the Crystal Cathedral's world-renowned organist emeritus, Frederick Swann. The organ currently comprises 270 ranks over fourteen divisions and has

A CATHEDRAL TRANSFORMATION

more than 17,000 pipes. Each of the two consoles has five manuals and pedals. While only the fifth largest pipe organ in the world, it is likely the most famous. Almost daily someone from some corner of the world calls or writes the Cathedral music office to inquire about its restoration, completion, and rededication, which will reach completion May 15-17, 2020, after which the iconic Hazel Wright organ will again sound in the sonic splendor of this great cathedral space. For organ aficionados, the biggest change, beyond the new

voicing to match the new acoustics, is the color of the giant organ cases, which have been transformed from an oak brown to a pure white. The goal was to blend in with the white quatrefoils and to give the altar, ambo, and cathedra prominence.

The Crystal Cathedral was completed in 1981, incorporating more than 11,000 rectangular panes of reflective glass. This iconic building and neighboring Crean Tower, which houses the fifty-two-bell Arvela Schuller carillon, were designed by American architect Philip Johnson. The gigantic all-glass edifice served as their worship space for more than forty years. As the Crystal Cathedral ministries fell into financial difficulty their thirty-six-acre campus, as well as the cathedral space itself, fell into disrepair. Finally having to be sold, it was Schuller himself who preferred that it remain a place of worship, and so the bid of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange was accepted. Sale of the building to the Diocese of Orange was finalized on February 3, 2012. The worship space has been renovated to accommodate the Roman Catholic liturgy.

This transformation began with gutting the inside of the enormous space right down to the glass walls. "Hazel" was dismantled pipe by pipe and carefully shipped back to the Ruffatti factory in Padua, Italy, for restoration. Plans for the new worship space were drawn and redrawn. The need for an Altar, Ambo (pulpit), and Cathedra (Bishop's chair), Blessed Sacrament Chapel, Reconciliation Chapels, and Baptistry meant that the inside would require a completely new vision. The massive glass

doors, ninety feet tall, which opened to the outside, would be closed and sealed forever. The space, once resembling a giant hot house, would be air-conditioned and freed from the elements of the outside. Much of the glass interior would be covered with a new system of quatrefoils, which were specially designed to help control the temperature and to assist with the acoustics.

Musically, the space would have quite different requirements in the liturgical life of this Catholic cathedral. Generous acoustics are required to let the music sound forth and accompany the liturgical action. Everything from Gregorian chant to polyphony, as well as the ethnic music of the Spanish and Vietnamese communities that also make up the 12,000-member cathedral parish, would need to be acoustically accommodated. The covering of much of the glass walls meant that the lower frequencies had a chance to blossom. Removing carpet and padded seats and replacing them with marble floors and walls and wooden pews meant a complete makeover for the acoustics of the cathedral. A re-voicing of each pipe of the magnificent pipe organ was necessary to convert the sound of the organ for this totally new acoustic.

Christ Cathedral was consecrated as America's newest Roman Catholic Cathedral on July 17, 2019. This three-hour ceremony, along with Evening Prayers and a first Parish Mass celebration, required a lot of music, multiple choirs, and instrumentalists. As with the dedication of any great cathedral, new music was commissioned. The Music Ded-

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ication Committee, chaired by the author as Cathedral Music Director, and the entire music staff began to work with texts of the Rite of Dedication to determine which new compositions should be commissioned.

Texts were selected and composers chosen, with the hope that these pieces would not only serve Christ Cathedral’s Rite of Dedication liturgy but would become a gift to the entire liturgical musical world as pieces which could be used by choirs and congregations everywhere. Composers Peter Latona, James Chepponis, Normand Gouin, Rachel Lauren, and Julian Revie were selected. The pieces were recorded by Gothic Re-

cords for a new album, “Dedication of Christ Cathedral,” and are being published in the “Cathedral Series,” which is edited by the author for

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This new cathedral also required new choirs. One of the first tasks was to form choirs worthy of this magnificent new space. Arriving almost four years before the opening of the cathedral, the task of creating this new cathedral’s music program began. Within the first few weeks singers were invited to begin forming three Cathedral Choirs: English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The Cathedral Choirs would sing each week for the weekend Masses and special parish liturgies. Two Diocesan Choirs for adults and children were also founded, with singers coming from the other sixty parishes of the



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diocese. These two choirs would be used in combination with the three Cathedral choirs for the large diocesan celebrations, not the least of which was the Cathedral's Dedication itself. Now with over 300 singers involved, the music ministry is well on the way to having notable music sounding in the new cathedral.

The Cathedral sanctuary retained the three existing balconies of the original Crystal Cathedral and added a new choir balcony behind the new altar. This new balcony is the home for the main console of the Hazel Wright Pipe Organ, a new Steinway Concert Grand Piano, space for 125 singers on seated risers (which can be expanded to 250 by incorporating the risers and chairs from the choir room), and also includes room for a forty-piece orchestra. This grand new choir balcony can easily be reconfigured to accommodate the many choirs that serve the eleven weekend masses, special diocesan liturgies, weddings, and funerals. Three large screens are used instead of worship leaflets or hymnals. While some might object, the congregation over these four years has been trained to know that when they see musical notation, it is their turn to participate. Music notes are used for all hymns, refrains, and mass parts. When only the text appears, it is their turn to pray along, whether following a choral anthem text, a scripture reading, or the translation of a reading or prayer being read in another language. With eleven regular weekend masses in four languages (English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese) and over 12,000 in attendance each weekend,

printed sheets would simply not be possible.

Beyond the liturgical life of the cathedral, its space is also ideal for the music outreach that sacred music concerts afford, and its goal is to become a center known for great worship and a place where great music is regularly experienced. Like most of the world's great cathedrals, the desire of the diocese is to provide a home where its choirs can perform concerts, as well as providing a place where world-class performers can bring the very best in sacred and classical music to Southern California.

Since so much of sacred music was written for the vast reverberant cathedrals of Europe rather than concert halls, Christ Cathedral wants to be a place similarly known for fostering great music in a sacred space. This newly consecrated cathedral has already hosted the Schola Cantorum from the London Oratory, a sellout performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* led by Maestro Carl St.Clair and the Pacific Symphony and Pacific Chorale, and the Tenebrae Choir from London. Included in the many concerts scheduled in the near future is a world premiere of music by Sir James MacMillan for Choir, Orchestra and Organ. In addition, there will be many organ concerts associated with the rededication of the Hazel Wright Organ.

A schedule of the many musical happenings at Christ Cathedral can be viewed at www.ChristCathedralMusic.org. In addition, the website contains over seventy-five podcasts of the Cathedral's weekly radio program "Music

from the Tower," which airs on Relevant Radio in Los Angeles and San Diego and is available on iTunes. It includes in-depth interviews and music from some of the world's greatest classical and sacred musicians.

Christ Cathedral must serve as the liturgical and musical paradigm for the Diocese of Orange, but it is also a place where the repertoire of the 1,500 years of musical history of the Catholic Church can be heard. It also strives to present the finest music of both the Spanish and Vietnamese traditions. Unlike any other Roman Catholic Cathedral, Christ Cathedral's congregation must never forget the outstanding tradition of musical excellence of the Crystal Cathedral and the great vision of Robert and Arvella Schuller.

Each Catholic cathedral must select its titular feast day. For many cathedrals it is as simple as choosing the day of their saint or feast day, for example Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception or St. Patrick's Cathedral. But while Christ Cathedral had the many feasts of Christ from which to choose, it turned out to be an easy choice. The feast day they have chosen is August 6, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. For while this cathedral project has just begun, the transformation has been great; a transformation of a building, an organ, and a music program. 