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Diocese bids $50 million for Crystal Cathedral

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ORANGE, Calif. (CNS) -- The Diocese of Orange has made a formal bid of $50 million to buy the Crystal Cathedral complex in Garden Grove, once the home church of the Rev. Robert Schuller, a noted television preacher.

The cathedral property was put up for auction earlier this year as part of the cathedral ministries bankruptcy proceedings.

Crystal Cathedral Ministries founded by Rev. Schuller, who is now retired, filed for bankruptcy last October. It was facing debt amounting to more than $50 million.

Opening in 1980, the 2,900-seat Crystal Cathedral was one of the nation's first megachurches. It is made up of more than 10,000 panes of glass.

The cathedral "underscores the vitality of faith in our modern society and with our offer we will enable this beacon of faith to continue to influence others as an important place of worship," Orange Bishop Tod D. Brown said in a statement.

The diocese's bid, announced July 22, has been presented to the Crystal Cathedral Ministries board of directors and the organization's counsel. Under the terms of the cash offer, the diocese would make an immediate deposit of $250,000, followed by a second payment of $750,000.

The diocese said that if Crystal Cathedral Ministries decides it needs to use some of the campus facilities for a period of time, it could lease back an area "at below-market rates." The diocese added that once that arrangement came to an end, it would help the organization relocate some of its ministries to other diocesan property.

The Orange Diocese does not currently have a cathedral to serve its 1.2 million Catholics. Based on the size of its Catholic population, Orange is the 11th largest diocese in the nation. The diocese covers all of Orange County, which has a total population of 3 million.

Bishop Brown said in his statement that after consulting a number of lay advisers, the diocese made the formal bid, one "that respects the legacy Rev. Schuller worked so hard to establish. Our offer also clearly accommodates future diocesan needs for a cathedral and modern administrative campus."

Once its bid is reviewed by the Crystal Cathedral Ministries board of directors, the diocese said, it would be presented to the creditors committee, which is part of any bankruptcy proceeding, and to the bankruptcy court itself.

If accepted by all parties, Bishop Brown said, purchase of the cathedral complex could be finalized by the end of the year. The diocese will have to consecrate the buildings and property for use as a Catholic cathedral and

worship site.

News reports have put cost estimates for building a new cathedral for the Orange Diocese at $100 million.

"When I first heard of their financial difficulties, I was distressed," Bishop Brown said in his statement. "Crystal Cathedral Ministries has been a valued religious resource for many, many years in Orange County and, through the 'Hour of Power,' around the globe.

"Like our own Mission San Juan Capistrano, its historic and cultural links are important to Orange County. Under this plan, we hope that that ministry can continue."

The bishop added that Rev. Schuller built up his ministry "from the humble roof of a drive-in snack stand, and that constant faith in God's providence, I believe, will sustain their community through these current trials."

On July 5, Chapman University, a private liberal arts university in Orange, made a $46 million bid for the 40-acre cathedral site. An offer also has come in from a Newport Beach real estate investment firm.

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