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California diocese to buy Crystal Cathedral

Monica Clark | Nov. 21, 2011 NCR Today

The iconic Crystal Cathedral [1], built by the Rev. Robert Schuller and made famous as the site of his "Hour of Power" television show, is set to become the cathedral of the Diocese of Orange in southern California.

U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Robert Kwan announced Nov. 17 that the board of directors of Crystal Cathedral Ministries had selected the diocese as the preferred buyer for the cathedral and its 31-acre campus, which had been the subject of complicated bankruptcy proceedings.

The diocese will pay $57.5 million for the Garden Grove property that includes the 10,000 glass-paned cathedral, an adjacent glass tower and chapel, several large centers, a school (pre-K through high school), an arboretum and a memorial garden.

The CCM board chose the diocesan proposal over a competing bid of $59 million by Chapman University, saying it wanted to ensure that the campus would remain the site of worship and outreach ministries.

The agreement allows CCM to lease the cathedral and other buildings from the diocese for up to three years. During that time, the diocesan pastoral center will be moved to the site and plans will be drawn up to renovate the cathedral interior for Catholic liturgy, diocesan officials said. The nearby 10-acre parish of St. Callistus and its parochial school will eventually move to the cathedral campus.
The diocese, established in 1976, was already developing plans for a new cathedral when the Crystal Cathedral property was opened for bid. Diocesan officials realized that acquiring the site would cost less than constructing a new cathedral and would be available more quickly, said diocesan officials.

The Crystal Cathedral began experiencing major fiscal problems in 2008 as revenue dropped and ticket sales for its holiday pageants declined. There was also a bitter and at times public dispute within the Schuller family about who should succeed the church's famed founder. CCM declared bankruptcy last year after its debts exceeded $43 million.

In announcing the purchase agreement, Bishop Tod Brown said he regretted the "difficult circumstances" that forced Schuller and his ministries to file for bankruptcy, but said he was pleased that the diocese can "protect this wonderful structure as a place of worship."

The Diocese of Orange is ranked tenth in Catholic population in the nation. Its new cathedral will seat more than 2400.

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Links:
[1] http://www.crystalcathedral.org/