

Words of Wisdom

The Voice of Our Retirees

Crystal Cathedral to Become a Catholic Cathedral



Article by Rev. Ralph Lord Roy

A retired United Methodist minister

Over the years, as time permitted, I've followed a variety of televangelists. Too many of them, in my opinion, have focused on narrow and dogmatic theology, end-times prophecy, occasionally even some astrology, and skipped around the Bible to select verses here and there to support a particular viewpoint. Some, however, have preached perceptive and inspirational messages that have been ecumenical in nature.

I respected the "Hour of Power", a ministry first launched by Dr. Robert H. Schuller (1926-2015) in a drive-in-theater in California. Schuller echoed the main theme of Norman Vincent Peale. Dr. Peale emphasized 'positive thinking' while Dr. Schuller focused on 'possibility thinking'. Both sought to avoid the pitfalls of doctrinaire preaching, highlighting instead the importance of such virtues as hope, courage, tenacity, gratitude, kindness, and good cheer. They also wrote best-selling books read by millions.

While I never met Dr. Schuller, I heard Dr. Peale preach from his Manhattan pulpit several times and attended his funeral at Marble Collegiate Church in 1993. I also knew his successor, Dr. Arthur Caliandro, from our seminary days. Both Peale and Caliandro had been ordained as Methodists, then joined the Reformed Church, evidence of how easily, amicably and frequently mainline Protestants change denominations. The Reformed Church once was better known as the Dutch Reformed Church, and the first parishes in New York City were started by the settlers from Holland. Marble Collegiate Church was founded in 1628.

President Trump has spoken of his connection with Marble Collegiate Church, though his name is not on the current membership role. In 1977 Dr. Peale performed the wedding of Trump and Ivana at the church. Dr. Caliandro officiated at his second wedding, to Maria Maples, held at the Plaza Hotel in New York.. He married Melania in 2005 at the Episcopal Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea in Palm Beach, Florida. The reception was at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

In light of Trump's particular concern about immigrants, it's interesting that his mother, Mary McLeod, came from Scotland, his first wife Ivana came from Czechoslovakia and his third and present wife Melania came from Slovenia. In 1999, because of his German ancestry on his paternal side, Trump was grand marshal of the annual German-American Steuben Parade in Manhattan.

Dr. Schuller's success as a pastor and preacher became symbolized by the magnificent Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, a 128-foot-tall structure and the largest glass building in the world. The congregation thrived for several decades, but then fell on difficult times and filed for bankruptcy in 2010. Roman Catholics in the Diocese of Orange, about 300,000 in 1980, have grown so that today they number over 1.5 million. Most of the increase is the result of immigration.

The Diocese of Orange was planning to build a new cathedral when the Crystal Cathedral became available, including seven buildings, 35 acres, and 340,000 square feet of building space. The Diocese wasn't the highest bidder, but at Dr. Schuller's request the bankruptcy judge awarded it the property for \$57.5 million. Its new owners set about making necessary repairs and adapting it to serve as a Catholic facility. Among rehabilitation challenges, the glass facade and roof were re-caulked to withstand an earthquake. The Hazel Wright organ, one of the largest in the world and named for its donor, has been moved to the side.

There has been some debate as to whether the changes diminish the beauty and openness of the original design.

The revamped cathedral will be known as Christ Cathedral, official seat of the Diocese of Orange, and the dedication is being planned for this summer. Father Christopher Smith, a priest on its staff, hails the transaction as "a very important sign of Christian unity." He expressed his pleasure at "keeping Schuller's legacy and Christianity at the heart of the building." The total cost



The Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, CA

of acquiring and adapting the building is about \$100 million, roughly half what a new cathedral would have cost.

The diocese currently offers 12 masses in four languages each week in another building on the campus. When Christ Cathedral opens, its seating capacity will be 3000, and the expectation is that the number of masses will be decreased

Meanwhile, the "Hour of Power" is continuing on television, led by Schuller's grandson who goes by the name of Bobby Schuller and is assisted by his wife, Hannah. Bobby launched his television ministry in 2015, the year his grandfather died. This congregation now meets at Shepherd's Grove in Irvine, California.



Interior of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, CA

Ralph Lord Roy of Southington is a retired United Methodist minister
Email: ralphroy@aol.com.



Robert Schuller inside the Crystal Cathedral in 1980