

Crystal Cathedral – The Church Made of Glass

Crystal Cathedral located in the city of Garden Grove south of Los Angeles is an imposing contemporary glass structure. The use of glass is particularly interesting because the cathedral is in a part of California that is prone to earthquakes. It was constructed in 1980 to accommodate an ever-increasing congregation that now counts 10,000 members.



From Drive-In to Cathedral

Reverend Robert Schuller and Arvella Schuller, his wife, relocated to California from Iowa in 1955. The reverend had received \$500 from the Reformed Church in America and he used the money to start a service in a drive-in theatre. He held weekly services at the theatre, which was located in Orange County. He encouraged people to attend the services in their family cars. People initially mocked him for his choice of venue because it was renowned as a spot for amorous teenagers. But his weekly services gained popularity with time.

Reverend Schuller had Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who authored *The Power of Positive Thinking* as his mentor. There was positive tone in all his messages. He chose to focus on positive aspects, encouragement, and hope instead of sin.

With his increasing popularity, Schuller attained success and this allowed him to construct a suitable church. He built a chapel a short distance away from the theatre. His initial plan was to leave the theatre but Schuller realized that the outdoor setting was convenient for some of his congregants such as the sick and those who suffered from disabilities. It was easier for them to listen to the preaching in their car as opposed to the small chapel.

Upon this realization, Reverend Schuller decided to commission for a one-of-a-kind church. He hired Richard Neutra, a popular architect to construct the new church. The building was supposed to house conventional and drive-in congregations. This building cost about \$3 million and was named the Garden Grove Community Drive-In Church. It was opened in 1963 and it featured 25-foot electronic doors that the Reverend could open to allow the drive-in congregation to join his services.



In 1970, Reverend Robert Schuller started the “Hour of Power” after Billy Graham encouraged him to share the word of God with more people. The show was first aired on one of the TV stations in Los Angeles. It only took a few years for the church to grow after the show went national. Schuller realized that his church was too small for his congregation.

He hired Philip Johnson to construct a new building that would accommodate a studio and a church. He wanted glass walls because it reminded him of his outdoor services. This was a unique concept because Orange County is known for frequent earthquakes. Crystal Cathedral was dedicated in 1980 and its impressive bell-tower was added a decade later.

Things to See

The Crystal Cathedral has a distinct four-pointed star outline. Its bell-tower is detached and it stands next to Reverend Schuller’s first church, Garden Grove Community Drive-In Church. The old church is now an arboretum.

It has a large parking lot and some of the walls have open parts, making it easy for drive-in congregants to participate in the services.

The Crystal Cathedral measures 415 feet in length, 207 feet in width, and 128 feet in height. It has more than 10,000 tempered glass windows. The glass is silver colored and it is supported by thousands of steel trusses. The cathedral can accommodate about 2,700 people inside.

One of the most impressive aspects about this church is that it is earthquake resistant. Silicone-based glue and adjustable hinges were used to allow the building to move in case of an earthquake. It can withstand an 8.0 earthquake.



Another unique attribute is the lack of air conditioning. Electric-powered staggered windows and high ceilings maintain a cool environment. The glass is reflective keeping out most of the heat and light from the sun. Its large doors also allow the breeze to get in during services. During winter, underground pipes

heat up the church.

The cathedral has one of the largest organs in the globe. Its organ has more than 16,000 separate pipes and more than 500 trumpet pipes.

It has a Rosso Alicante marble chancel and granite pulpit and altar. The cathedral also has a wooden cross embellished with a gold-leaf. There is a large Sony Jumbotron screen that measures 11.5 ft. x 15 ft. There are several contemporary statues on the grounds.

The impressive building is worth seeing for any traveler coming in the region.

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