



Hazel is Back: Diocese of Orange and Christ Cathedral celebrate completed restoration of world-famous Hazel Wright Organ

Description

The pipe organ, widely heard from its decades on the Crystal Cathedral's 'Hour of Power,' will be blessed by Bishop Kevin Vann in a special ceremony on June 10, with recital to follow from the Vatican's principal organist who is flying in from Rome for the special occasion.

GARDEN GROVE, Calif. (June 2, 2022) — The Diocese of Orange, The Orange Catholic Foundation and music ministry of Christ Cathedral are pleased to announce the completed \$3-million restoration of the Hazel Wright Organ, an iconic instrument made famous around the world for its association with the Rev. Robert Schuller's "Hour of Power" broadcast.

Hazel is back!

To celebrate, all in the Diocese and music lovers everywhere are invited to a free public blessing ceremony for "Hazel" — as the instrument is affectionately known — led by Bishop Kevin W. Vann on June 10 at 6:30 p.m. inside Christ Cathedral in Garden Grove. The event is expected to last one hour and includes an entrance procession, a greeting and introductory rites from Bishop Vann, biblical readings, a blessing of the organ with incense, prayers and a choral piece with 100 singers.

Hazel will also receive a special Papal blessing from Pope Francis.

No tickets are required. The event will be livestreamed and viewable by visiting HazelWrightOrgan.com and the Diocese of Orange's Facebook page.

The blessing day will give the public a chance to hear Hazel returned to her full glory as the world's fifth largest organ with more than 17,000 pipes, 300+ stops and nearly 300 ranks. The organ plays from all four corners of the cathedral, giving listeners a unique "surround sound" experience.

Coming in from Vatican City to play and make a special appearance at the blessing is Josep Sole?

Coll, the principal organist of St. Peter's Basilica and organist for the liturgical celebrations of Pope Francis. Coll will conclude the blessing ceremony with a festive postlude recital.

Before the blessing, invited members of the press can attend a special media day demonstration of Hazel from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. That event will include interview opportunities, an up-close look at the organ's massive console and music from ChristCathedral organist David Ball, cathedral rector Fr. Christopher Smith and Coll.

Restoring an icon

The blessing day has been nearly a decade in the making. The \$3-million restoration effort for the organ started not long after the Diocese of Orange finished its purchase of the former Crystal Cathedral campus in 2012. At the time, Diocesan leaders could see that the complex instrument needed major restoration work.

Portions of Hazel had melted in the heat and humidity, and crews even discovered dead birds and bugs inside her maze of pipes. The scenario forced Diocesan leadership to realize that much was needed to make Hazel sound her best again.

Bishop Vann, who played piano and organ while growing up in Springfield, Ill., prioritized the project.

"To neglect Hazel or not repair her would not be a good thing," he said. "There was never any doubt in my mind that it wasn't going to get done. The organ plays an important part in the Mass. It encourages people to sing and pray, and to hear the presence of God in a way that really nothing else can do. In restoring Hazel, I wanted to show everyone that yes, the Catholic church was going to appreciate this instrument and rebuild her, to help her sing again with the glory of God."

In 2014, the instrument was carefully dismantled piece by piece and shipped to Padua, Italy, home of the Fratelli Ruffatti company, which has a strong historical connection to Hazel.

That connection dates to the 1970s, when the Rev. Schuller contracted the renowned pipe organ manufacturer to build a new organ for his Garden Grove Community Church, a building that today is known as the Arboretum. The commission was completed in 1977.

However, by that time, Rev. Schuller was already working on his expansion effort that would become the Crystal Cathedral. Schuller's glass edifice clearly needed a magnificent instrument, so, with design help from famed organist Virgil Fox, the decision was made to combine the 1977 Ruffatti with a 1962 Aeolian-Skinner organ from Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. These two instruments became the bulk of what would become the Hazel Wright Organ.

Hazel was dedicated in 1982, two years after the Crystal Cathedral opened. Rev. Schuller named her after Hazel C. Wright, a Chicago-area donor who loved the "Hour of Power" broadcast and wanted to donate to Schuller's ministry. Interestingly, Wright, who died in 1984, gave her initial gift unsolicited, and she fostered no strong feelings toward the Crystal Cathedral's robust music program.

"What's notable about Mrs. Wright is that she wasn't particularly devoted to the organ itself," said Dr. David Crean, an organ teacher at Wright State University in Ohio who wrote a newly published book

about the history of Hazel. “However, she recognized the instrument’s central and powerful role in the Schullers’ ministries. She knew her gift would mean a great deal to millions of people all over the world.”

A new era for Hazel

For Bishop Vann, it was extremely important to have Hazel’s restoration done by Fratelli Ruffatti.

“We needed to go back to the people who built it,” he said, “to the people who know the instrument intimately.”

In 2016, Hazel returned from her refurbishment in Italy. She was stored in an Irvine warehouse until the transformation of the Crystal Cathedral into Christ Cathedral was completed in 2019.

Unfortunately, Hazel, though reinstalled inside the building, was not quite ready in time for Christ Cathedral’s July 2019 dedication, so the music ministry used a digital organ on loan from the Pennsylvania-based Walker Technical Company. For more than two years, parishioners heard digital organ music coming from speakers placed throughout the sanctuary, rather than from Hazel, whose cases were painted white from their original brown to match the new Christ Cathedral aesthetic.

In 2019, the Fratelli Ruffatti team began their work on voicing the organ. In fact, during the reinstallation process, an ex-police officer came into the cathedral with a shotgun. Using a blank round, he fired the shotgun to test the reverberation in the building. It was important not to have too much reverberation, but to maintain a balance between sound clarity and warmth, according to Piero Ruffatti, a partner at Fratelli Ruffatti and one of the organ’s original builders.

The Diocese of Orange planned to celebrate the completed restoration of Hazel in 2020, but the Ruffatti team had to pause the project prematurely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This delayed Hazel’s return until the project began again in late 2021, when the Ruffatti team returned to finish the voicing work.

By early 2022, with the meticulous voicing process finished and the temporary Walker digital instrument uninstalled, a nearly finished Hazel made her debut during a special ceremony on Feb. 7. On that day, in front of the organ’s main console, Bishop Vann, Fr. Christopher, Dr. Frederick Swann (former organist for the Crystal Cathedral), David Ball (Christ Cathedral organist and head of music ministry), Kevin Cartwright of Rosales Organ Builders (the organ’s new curator), Piero Ruffatti (the original builder of the organ) and Gabriel Ferrucci (an Orange County philanthropist, businessman and major Diocese donor who served as a liaison between the Diocese and Fratelli Ruffatti, effective due to his language skills and cultural awareness) gathered and signed a special agreement.

In effect, Dr. Swann accepted the organ’s restoration work by Fratelli Ruffatti and handed it off to Cartwright’s company, Los Angeles-based Rosales Organ Builders, for continued maintenance. The ceremony also included the inaugural performance of Daniel Ficarri’s “Fanfare-Introduction in D,” which was commissioned specifically for Hazel.

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Better with age

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Handout pictures available here:

<https://rcbo.filecamp.com/s/faDHEKCPoWcB7i5p/c>

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Hazel Wright Organ Media Day

What: Invite-only press preview of the restored Hazel Wright Organ. It will include a demonstration, tour of the organ and music

When: 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., June 10

Where: Christ Cathedral, 13280 Chapman Ave., Garden Grove

Interviews: Opportunities with key stakeholders of the Hazel Wright Organ will be available during Media Day, both in group settings and one on one.

Filming and photography: Television cameras and still cameras will be permitted in the cathedral and near the organ during Media Day.

RSVP: Please RSVP with the Office of Communications at bzint@rcbo.org or (714) 282-6052

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Hazel Wright Organ Blessing Ceremony

What: Media and the public are invited to the blessing ceremony for the restored Hazel Wright Organ.

When: 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., June 10

Where: Christ Cathedral, 13280 Chapman Ave., Garden Grove

Interviews: Diocese leaders and other key stakeholders of the Hazel Wright Organ will not be available for interviews before or after the blessing ceremony. Please attend Media Day beforehand for interview opportunities.

Filming and photography: Television cameras will not be permitted in the cathedral during the blessing ceremony. Please obtain footage during Media Day. Still photographers are permitted to photograph the blessing ceremony but are advised to bring long lenses because they will be shooting from a distance.

Livestream: The event's livestream will be available for editorial use on the Diocese of Orange's Facebook page and HazelWrightOrgan.com.

RSVP: Please RSVP with the Office of Communications at bzint@rcbo.org or (714) 282-6052

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About the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange

With 1.3 million Catholics, 57 parishes, five Catholic centers and 35 schools, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange is one of the largest and most diverse faith communities in the United States. The Diocese empowers Catholics across Orange County to have an active life of faith that is integrated and woven into the fabric of their daily lives through the community and sacramental life of the Church. Under the leadership of Bishop Kevin Vann, the Diocese works to establish and support dynamic, vibrant parishes and schools welcoming all to live the Gospel with faith, joy, charity and unity. Christ Cathedral, the spiritual home of the Bishop of Orange, was dedicated in July 2019.

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About The Orange Catholic Foundation

The Orange Catholic Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable corporation that serves the Catholic community of Orange County. As a foundation for Catholics, we assist families and individuals to leave a legacy uniquely aligned with their Catholic values and beliefs. The Foundation's primary function is to raise, grow, and steward funds and endowments. The Foundation works with donors to customize their charitable intentions for Catholic organizations throughout Orange County.

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