

Crystal Cathedral Members Laugh, Cry During Bankruptcy Hearing

A U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge on Monday afternoon delayed its final decision on who would take control of the Crystal Cathedral campus. The delay came after Chapman University upped the ante with a new bid on the property.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange had the high bid over the weekend at \$57.1 million. Chapman entered the courtroom on Monday with a new plan to allow Crystal Cathedral Ministries to rent back the core buildings of its campus for \$1 million a month, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Chapman's earlier deal offered \$51.5 million and a lease-back payment of \$150,000 a month.

"It has become more obvious than ever that the Crystal Cathedral is a central and special part of the county," Chapman University president James Doti said during the hearing. "The congregants of this church have shown that they have the will. We are offering them the way."

Crystal Cathedral members, who have been standing in faith for a financial miracle that would allow it to keep the property, were emotional during the hearing, according to an MSNBC report. Members laughed, wept and applauded at times until Judge Robert Kwan called the court order.

"I understand this is an emotional issue," Kwan said. "But this is a very serious hearing, not a football game."

Crystal Cathedral's board now has until Thursday afternoon to discuss the new proposal. Kwan is expected to make his final decision at that time.

The Crystal Cathedral case has been wrought with controversy, speculation and rumors. In July, church founder Robert H. Schuller was reportedly ousted from the board of Crystal Cathedral Ministries, but later reports confirmed he remains board chairman emeritus. And in October, allegations emerged that Schuller misused funds.

Schuller disputed the allegations in a lawsuit Crystal Cathedral's creditors' committee filed, insisting that the ministry's executive board has acted in "good faith" in seeking the megachurch's best interests.

Meanwhile, Carol Milner, the Schuller's eldest daughter, has asked that \$6.5 million be reserved to pay claims related to contract termination and copyright infringement with her family.

"My parents have given all their assets to the church," MSNBC reported Milner as saying. "They are paying a lot in attorney's fees and have a huge mortgage on their home that they took out to keep the ministry alive. At their age, they cannot afford to take risks."