

Son says sibling rivalry fueled cathedral troubles

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [April 18, 2012](#) issue

As the Crystal Cathedral tries to find its footing without any members of founder Robert H. Schuller's family at the helm, the only son and onetime successor says "sibling rivalry" played a key role in the California megachurch's decline.

"They didn't want to be accountable to me, their brother," said Robert A. Schuller, the church's former senior pastor, of his sisters and brothers-in-law, some of whom were board members and ministry staffers.

Chalking it up to sibling rivalry in an interview March 19, Robert A. Schuller, 57, said, "They took steps into their own hands to make sure that they had job security." He said his siblings took advantage of his father's signs of dementia and halted the younger Schuller's 2006 succession to his father's ministry within two years. He left the gleaming megachurch in 2008.

The onetime heir apparent said his 85-year-old father's memory has been failing for at least ten years.

"My sisters were able to manipulate that because of his mental capacities," said Schuller, now co-owner of YouToo TV, a television and social media network. "It was the demise of the ministry."

Family members could not immediately be reached for comment.

Schuller's parents recently resigned from the ministry they founded more than 50 years ago, citing financial disputes with the board. Their daughter,

former Crystal Cathedral senior pastor Sheila Schuller Coleman, started a new church in a nearby movie theater in the city of Orange on March 18. It has made plans to meet at a nearby hotel for the following four weeks.

Schuller said the ministry his father led was able to thrive without the glass-walled building for which it became known, and its prime years began in the 1970s, before the large edifice was dedicated. He thinks that business decisions to focus on the *Hour of Power* television show and to not have an independent board led to the ministry's decline.

Schuller nevertheless believes that both Coleman's new congregation and the cathedral's current congregation can continue.

The cathedral worshipers will have to move within three years following the sale of the megachurch campus to the Catholic Diocese of Orange in bankruptcy proceedings.

"I think there's definitely a potential there for a congregation to survive without the Crystal Cathedral," Schuller said. "The congregation is the people. It's not the building." He also thinks family-run ministries can survive despite the inherent risks. "I think family-run ministries are fabulous, but they have to be placed in proper governance," he said, noting that potential big donors were uncomfortable with the way Crystal Cathedral Ministries was run.

Schuller said he didn't speak to family members for 18 months, but he now sees his parents regularly and talks with his siblings periodically. "It's not good to hold onto grudges," he said. "Even though they've done this, it's kind of like over now and time to move on." —RNS