

INTRODUCTION

Saint Agnes Parish is happy to help you as you consider marriage in the Catholic Faith Community. In the Catholic Tradition, marriage is an event not only in the lives of the two who are exchanging vows but of the whole community. Our community has an interest in encouraging strong marriages for the sake of the community as well as the happiness of husband and wife.

It is hoped that couples will find this policy document helpful in their initial plans, particularly with regard to the wedding ceremony. It is also hoped that couples will understand and appreciate the circumstances that have resulted in the composing of this policy. The reason for this policy should become clear as you read.

We cannot emphasize enough that one should be wary of finalizing any other wedding plans (such as reception hall, musicians, caterer, etc.) until one has a commitment from a priest or deacon to witness the wedding. Just because a date or time for the church is available does not mean that a priest or deacon is available and able to commit to witnessing the ceremony. **This is extremely important to understand and remember.**

It is also important to understand that as part of the preparation process a deacon or priest must make some estimation of a couple's readiness to be married. For this reason also, one should be wary about finalizing any other wedding plans until an available deacon or priest has indicated that he will witness the marriage.

In cases where the bride or groom has prior marriages, a wedding date should not be established until all of the proper annulment(s) have been granted.

Lastly, please be aware that there are certain fees that you will be responsible for. Please read and become familiar with the fee schedule contained in this document.

WHO MAY SCHEDULE A WEDDING AT SAINT AGNES

To celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage at Saint Agnes Church:

- A. One or both of the parties involved must be members of Saint Agnes Parish.
1. **RESIDING WITHIN THE PARISH:** According to canon law, all Catholics who reside within the geographical boundaries of Saint Agnes Parish are considered members of the parish, unless they have registered in another parish. Naturally, we hope that if you reside within the geographical boundaries of Saint Agnes, you will register at Saint Agnes at your earliest convenience, unless you plan to register and be a member of another parish. The geographical boundaries of Saint Agnes include Fort Wright and Park Hills, and some adjacent areas of Covington and Fort Mitchell. Please call the Parish Office if you have any questions.
 2. **RESIDING OUTSIDE OF THE PARISH:** If you live outside the geographical boundaries of Saint Agnes Parish, you must register at Saint Agnes Parish and have been an active, contributing member of Saint Agnes Parish for one year before you can schedule a wedding at Saint Agnes.
 3. **EXCEPTIONS:** A child of parishioner can have their wedding at Saint Agnes. If the child currently belongs to another parish, he or she will be asked to obtain a letter from their pastor, granting permission for him or her to be married at Saint Agnes.

The grandchild of a parishioner can generally have their wedding at Saint Agnes as a favor to their grandparent. If the grandchild currently belongs to another parish, he or she will be asked to obtain a letter from their pastor, granting permission for him or her to be married at Saint Agnes.

Cases handled on an individual basis by the priest or deacon working with a couple may be scheduled by the priest or deacon at their discretion. In such situations, the couple may be asked to pay a special fee (currently \$350) for use of the parish facilities. In this situation, Catholics who belong to other parishes will be asked to obtain a letter of permission from their pastor, granting permission for him or her to be married at Saint Agnes.

- B. After a couple has become engaged they can present themselves to the parish for the Sacrament of Marriage. This initial contact should take place at least nine months (exceptions are considered) in advance of the anticipated wedding date. The initial contact usually entails giving general information to the parish administrative assistant who will forward the information to the priest or deacon that will be working with the couple. The parish administrative assistant can give information about the availability of the church for given dates and times, but cannot schedule the date or reserve it. Only the priest or deacon who will work with the couple and preside at the wedding can reserve a date/time for the church.
- C. It is possible to celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage throughout the year. However, because of the penitential nature of the Season of Lent (from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday), it is recommended that if all possible couples avoid scheduling their marriage ceremony during this time.
- D. Before a date can be finalized, the couple must make contact with the priest or deacon who will officiate at the ceremony. Any priest or deacon who is in good standing with the Catholic Church is permitted to serve in this capacity. If not assigned to Saint Agnes, this priest or deacon must contact the parish and verify his commitment to officiate at the ceremony. This priest or deacon is also required to see that the couple is prepared for the sacrament (fulfilling parish and diocesan requirements) and must complete with the couple the required pre-nuptial paperwork.
- E. Please remember, the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage is a religious and spiritual event. In order to preserve and honor the sacred nature of this sacrament, certain secular options and practices cannot be incorporated into the ceremony. Such matters are discussed in this Policy. It is recommended that you read this Policy before proceeding any further so that you become aware of what is permitted and not permitted, what is possible and what is not possible, with regards to celebrating your marriage here at Saint Agnes Church.

MEETINGS WITH A PRIEST OR DEACON: The priest or deacon who is working with you will want to meet with you to: 1) get to know you, 2) to explain the process, requirements and answer any questions, 3) to complete the necessary papers and take the necessary statements from you, and 4) to prepare the actual wedding ceremony. This is normally done over the course of several meetings. Some priests and deacon like to use instruments such as the “Pre-Marital Inventory” (PMI) to help with the preparations. These instruments, normally are personality inventories that help identify areas of discussions for those preparing for marriage. They should not be understood as “tests” for marriageability or compatibility, nor predictors of marriage. They may involve additional meetings.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION PROGRAMS: In our Diocese of Covington, all couples are required to participate in a diocesan marriage preparation program. There are several options: Living Marriage as a Sacrament, Engaged Encounter and Evenings For the Engaged. The priest or deacon who is working with you will explain these programs to you and give you information on their cost and how to sign up. Couples will be given a certificate, verifying their participation. A copy of this certificate is to be included in their marriage file.

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING CLASSES: In our Diocese of Covington, as of January 1, 2009, couples preparing for marriage are required to participate in a series of classes on Natural Family Planning. The priest or deacon working with you will explain what is needed to fulfill this requirement, its cost and how to sign up. Couples will be given a certificate, verifying their participation. A copy of this certificate is to be included in their marriage file at the rectory.

WHEN PLANNING THE WEDDING CEREMONY, PLEASE KEEP IN MIND...

A Roman Catholic Wedding Ceremony (with Mass or without Mass) is a communal event in the life of a parish community and the life of our larger Church. A Catholic Wedding is not the propriety of an individual/family nor is it a “service” provided by a parish for a couple or their families, thereby entitling them to tailor or define the ritual/liturgy to their desires. Even when the couple’s relationship to the church community may be tenuous, nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Wedding ceremony is understood by our Tradition to be an expression of Faith of the whole Catholic Community, particularly its faith in the sanctity of Marriage as a Sacrament.

Saint Agnes has the responsibility to its own members and to the larger Roman Catholic Church to maintain the integrity of its Wedding Liturgies and its facilities as places of worship. Saint Agnes reserves to itself the “final say” with regards to what happens in the context of Weddings that are held at Saint Agnes.

Please remember that the most important part of your wedding is the exchange of vows. Before friends, family, the Church and God, you will vow to be true to each other in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love and honor each other all the days of your life. This is a vow, and vows by their very nature are solemn. You are giving your Word. As has been said, when one makes a vow, one holds their very soul in their hands. Plans should be considered that emphasize that you are two adults who have made a mature decision to get married and that as adults you stand together to exchange your vows.

Ceremonies where both the bride and groom greet their guests... where they walk to the altar together or they are both escorted by their parents.... where they take active roles in the Liturgy (such as serving as lectors or Eucharistic Ministers) all bespeak a maturity with which the bride and groom understand what they are undertaking.

In planning your wedding ceremony, consideration should always be given as to what effect plans will have on the centrality of the exchange of vows. The vows themselves are powerful and beautiful. Be considerate of how your planning will affect the moment when you make your vows. Will it enhance the moment and its meaning, or distract from it. As a general rule, the simpler the ceremony, the more moving, powerful and memorable will be the exchange of vows.

When you meet with a priest or deacon, they will make available to you materials that will help you with regard to picking out readings from Scripture, prayers and other aspects of the wedding ceremony. The priest and deacon will also meet with you to finalize all aspects of the ceremony. The rehearsal for the wedding is a time to do fine tuning, however all major decisions about the ceremony should be made before the rehearsal. If you have any questions, please call the priest or deacon who will preside at your ceremony.

Your musician should be able to help you with regard to picking music. Please remember, all music must be approved by our parish music director (currently Mr. Bobby Fisher). Please see “Music” below.

WHAT KIND OF WEDDING CEREMONY?

IN GENERAL

Marriage “in the Church” is more than just a ceremony. In the Catholic Tradition, it is an act of faith in God and a statement of belief and commitment to a religious tradition, in this case the Roman Catholic religious tradition. In the case of a couple, neither of whom has a serious intention of practicing the Catholic religion before and after the wedding, a Catholic wedding Liturgy in a Catholic Church, witnessed by Catholic clergy is not appropriate. If the occasion of your wedding has prompted interest in you to inquire about the Catholic Church or to renew your commitment, our parish staff is happy to help you and we encourage you to follow-up on this interest.

WEDDING CEREMONY AND MASS

For couples where both parties are active Catholics, the norm is a wedding ceremony within the context of a Eucharistic Liturgy (Mass).

WEDDING CEREMONY WITHOUT MASS

To begin with, it is important to understand that a Catholic wedding held outside of the context of Mass is in no way “less Catholic” or “less of a Sacrament.” A wedding ceremony without a Mass is strongly suggested as a consideration to the non-Catholic bride or groom as well as to those guests who will be attending and who are not Catholic and who normally would not be receiving Communion.

At a wedding where both parties are Catholic but it is expected that a large number of guests will not be Catholic, a wedding ceremony without a Mass may be arranged in consideration of the non-Catholic guests.

A deacon may preside at a wedding ceremony when there is not a Mass.

CONVALIDATIONS (when a couple is not married “in the church”)

A convalidation is a ceremony where a priest or deacon witnesses the vows of a couple, at least one of whom is Catholic, who did not get married as prescribed by the discipline/laws of the Catholic Church, such as before a Justice of the Peace. This is sometimes called having the church “bless” a marriage.

DATES AND TIMES FOR WEDDINGS

DATES

Please be aware of the Liturgical Seasons and Holy Days that may coincide with your anticipated wedding date. Whatever Liturgical decorations the parish has in place will remain in place. You will not be allowed to remove or tamper with these decorations in any way.

If your anticipated wedding date falls during Advent, be aware that the Advent wreath will be on display and will remain where it is. Likewise, the violet panels behind the tabernacle will remain in place. For the first weeks of Advent, a Giving Tree may also be present near the sanctuary.

Decorations for Christmas - including poinsettias, Christmas trees, window decorations, etc. will remain in place.

Lent (the six weeks before Easter) is a very special season in which we prepare to renew our Baptismal Promises. By its nature, it is a more austere time and our church decor will reflect that. We discourage couples from having a wedding during this more somber season. If a wedding is scheduled during Lent, any

decor supplied by a couple should reflect the sense of the season of Lent. Couples whose wedding is held during Lent are also expected to respect and not tamper with any existing Lenten decor inside or outside the Church.

Weddings may not be scheduled at all:

- during the weekend of Palm Sunday (the weekend before Easter)
- during Holy Week (Palm Sunday through Easter Sunday)

TIMES

Weddings on Saturdays must be scheduled between 10:30 AM and 1:00 PM, at 6:00 PM or at 6:30 PM.

Weddings on other days of the week may be scheduled according to the availability of the church and a priest or deacon.

Because the ceremony for convalidations is usually much simpler (and briefer) there is more flexibility in scheduling convalidations.

SATURDAY EVENING WEDDINGS, THE SUNDAY OBLIGATION and READINGS

Saint Agnes is part of the Diocese of Covington. In our diocese, any Mass that begins after 4 PM on Saturday is considered a Sunday Mass. Therefore, wedding Masses on Saturday evening are also Sunday obligation Masses. This also means that Catholics that wish to attend this Mass (even though not invited to the wedding) cannot be turned away.

Strictly speaking, for wedding Masses on Saturdays after 4 PM, the readings for that Sunday should be used, though a special reading related to marriage may be substituted for the second reading. If the ceremony is a wedding ceremony without Mass, then other readings may be chosen.

ABOUT THE CHURCH BUILDING and CHAPEL:

Our church can seat about 900. The main body of this church seats about 625. The annex seats about 275. The main body of church has 26 pews on each side of the main aisle. The main aisle is 90 feet long.

While most weddings are held in the main church we do have a smaller chapel available for more intimate weddings (approximately 60-70 guests). The chapel is not handicap accessible. There is not an organ or piano in the chapel.

MUSIC

All music used in Church must be religious music. This includes prelude and postlude music. A musician knowledgeable of religious music, especially in the context of the Roman Catholic Tradition, can be very helpful in suggesting and picking beautiful and appropriate music. While it is permissible to utilize musicians and/or singers from outside of the parish, final decisions of musical selections for your wedding must be approved by the parish music director (currently Mr. Bobby Fisher). This is most easily facilitated by having the person coordinating your wedding music contact directly the parish music director.

We do not permit the playing of recorded music or video (tapes, CD's, DVD's etc.) in church for weddings.

PHOTOGRAPHY, VIDEOGRAPHY

We suggest/encourage couples to have ALL of their pictures taken before the ceremony. When pictures are taken before the wedding, clothes are not wrinkled, makeup is freshest, hair is still in place, and people are (and look) less tired. In other words, it makes for better pictures. Also, by taking all pictures before the ceremony, couples may arrive at their reception immediately after the ceremony and welcome their guests (have a receiving line) to their reception.

Couples who do chose to take pictures after the ceremony, will be allowed 45 minutes immediately after the ceremony concludes to have their pictures taken. Couples should inform their photographer of this.

Flash photography may be used during the entrance procession and during the recessional. Flash photography may not be used during the ceremony. Flash photography is very distracting to the minister and to the congregation. If those attending the wedding will be taking pictures, please ask them not to use flash photography during the ceremony. (Often, those attending the wedding create the biggest distractions with cameras that are often noisy and with flashes.)

Photographers and videographers may never come into the sanctuary at any time and are expected to do their work without calling attention to themselves (and becoming a part of the ceremony themselves). Cameras may be set up in the choir loft and along the side of church.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

A church is a sacred place, a place set apart for sacred rituals. Catholics respect this sacred space because of what goes on in it. Saint Agnes Parish expects all who use our facilities to respect the church building, especially the worship areas. For this reason, at weddings and wedding rehearsals behavior that is loud, disruptive, and disrespectful or otherwise disturbing of the prayerful atmosphere will not be tolerated. Likewise, the consumption of alcohol and displays of intoxication by wedding parties will not be tolerated before or during wedding rehearsals or wedding ceremonies. Such behavior will jeopardize that individual's privilege of participating in the wedding and may very well jeopardize the wedding itself.

The throwing of rice, birdseed, confetti or flower petals is not allowed inside or outside of church. The dropping of flower petals by a flower girl is also prohibited (They are very difficult to clean up.)

Runners are completely optional. We discourage the use runners that are made of paper or plastic. They often tear, get bunched up and become a trip-hazard. If you choose to use a runner, we encourage the use (rental) of a linen runner. They stay in place, lie flat and look much better.

The unity candle is completely optional and in general not encouraged. It is not really a part of a Catholic wedding ceremony. It has been added on over the years. The unity candle tends to be redundant and to distract from the vows and exchange of rings. The exchange of the wedding rings and the wedding rings themselves are the more enduring and traditional sign of the vows just made. (A suggested alternative is to use a unity candle at the rehearsal dinner or at the reception.)

Currently, Saint Agnes does not have a dressing room for the bride or groom. Some couples do use our chapel for some final preparations and as a place to stay before the ceremony. It is a chapel however, and we ask that this be respected. No food or drinks should be brought into this chapel. Please keep this in mind when making arrangements for the dressing needs of those in your wedding. Murphy Hall (underneath the church) may also be used if it is not otherwise being used.

Regarding flowers, we suggest arrangements to be placed in front of the ambo and under the tabernacle. Matching arrangements for the statues of Mary and Joseph are nice, but not as noticeable. Flowers are not allowed to be placed on, under, in front of or around the main altar. It is customary to leave the flowers in Church after the wedding.

WHAT DOES “ACTIVE” MEAN and WHAT IF I’M NOT...

For the sake of this document, the words such as “active” and “practicing” are used to describe Catholics who are actively involved in their parish and practicing their faith. The minimum activity is usually understood to mean regular attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days and demonstrated financial support of the parish’s mission (i.e. contributing in the Sunday collection, completing commitment cards for the Offertory Program and Diocesan Parish Annual Appeal). Support of the Parish’s mission also includes volunteering to help do the actual work, such as serving as a Lector at Mass, or being a member of our Christian Outreach Committee.

Because Saint Agnes is a very large parish, it is very easy for persons not to be known personally by the priests or deacons. For this reason, the history of support as shown by collection records is about the most objective way of demonstrating one’s Sunday Mass attendance and support of the parish. In order for such contributions to be recorded properly, couples must use the envelopes that are mailed to all registered parishioners.

This understanding of the term “practice” does not reflect a judgement upon a person’s sincerity, authenticity or commitment to their personal spiritual or religious practice. It does reflect the belief in our Church that the celebration of a Sacrament (any Sacrament, including Marriage) is a public act of faith. Our Church’s tradition regarding the Sacrament of Marriage is that when two people exchange vows before an altar in a Catholic Church, they do so as persons of faith in God and persons of commitment to the Catholic Tradition in which they are being married. At the heart of that Catholic Tradition is attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.

As a practical matter, the terms “practice” reflects the reality that parishes with large numbers of weddings must give a priority to those who are actively supporting the parish’s work and who have a demonstrated history of doing so. Churches, like every other organization, have operating costs such as utility bills, insurance, maintenance, etc. Beyond this “overhead”, is the life of worship, ministry and outreach that a parish provides. These all require the support of parishioners’ time, talent and treasure. To be an active member of the Church is to be an active participant in the Church’s witness. It is only fair that those who have helped to shoulder these costs and who have a demonstrated history of support and active participation in the parish’s ministries be given a priority.

Saint Agnes Parish takes this opportunity to encourage couples who are currently not practicing their Catholicism or minimally practicing it to begin to practice actively and fully. The only reason Saint Agnes Parish exists now is because of the dedicated interest and support of many people over its history. Couples now planning for marriage should begin to consider that if they want a Roman Catholic parish to be here in the future for them (their children and grandchildren). If so, they need to get involved now. On a more personal level, many couples with successful relationships have found that having an active religious life and being part of religious community (a parish) are very helpful in providing a religious context for their individual lives and their married life – a context that gives meaning to the difficult times in life and marriage and allows for broader celebration of life’s transcendent moments, such as the birth of a child. It also provides a basis for giving moral instruction to children.

If you have questions or concerns about the Catholic Church or Saint Agnes Parish, please call the Parish Office

and arrange to speak with one of the deacons or priests. They are there to help you and are more than happy to do so.

WEDDING FEES

You will be invoiced about a month before you wedding for all fees payable to Saint Agnes.

Servers

Weddings with Mass: 3 servers recommended:	\$20.00 per server paid to Saint Agnes
Wedding without a Mass: 3 servers recommended:	\$20.00 per server paid to Saint Agnes

Saint Agnes Parish Priest or Deacon:

Marriage prep meetings (usually at least three) wedding rehearsal and wedding itself:	\$150 paid to Saint Agnes
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A Priest or Deacon, not from Saint Agnes Parish:

In this case, the priest's or deacon's fee depends on the individual minister and is paid directly to him.

Use of main church (includes fee for sacristan to set-up, clean-up, etc.):

Parishioner	\$100 paid to Saint Agnes
Non-Parishioner	\$350 paid to Saint Agnes

Use of chapel

Parishioner	No charge
Non-Parishioner	\$100 paid to Saint Agnes

PLEASE NOTE:

1. Invoices are normally sent out about a month before your wedding date. Invoices must be paid at least two weeks before the wedding. Fees will be refunded upon written notification of cancellation of the wedding.
2. The fees for active parishioners may be reduced if couples can demonstrate a need and if the other plans (reception hall, flowers, limousine services, etc.) for the wedding reflect this need as well.
3. None of the above fees includes any fees for musicians, florists, photographers, etc.