

# WEDDING GUIDELINES

for  
St. Agnes Catholic Church  
Baltimore, Maryland



*"Love is patient, love is kind. It bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."*

1 Corinthians 13:4, 7-8

# Saint Agnes Catholic Church

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Congratulations!

We are happy that you are planning to be married at St. Agnes Church. We hope that your wedding will be a joyful expression of your love, as you make your vows in the presence of the Lord. "Christ abundantly blesses your love. He enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity." (The Rite of Marriage)

We present this booklet to help you plan your wedding celebration. The guidelines included in it reflect the requirements of the Roman Catholic Church, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and our own parish of St. Agnes.

Please accept our sincere wishes and prayers for a happy married life.

- The Parishioners and Parish Staff of St. Agnes

**1. Initial Wedding Arrangements.** The Archdiocese of Baltimore requires that you notify the parish at least six months before the time that you hope to marry. You may request the pastor, associate pastor or Deacon of our church, or you may invite another Catholic Priest or Deacon to preside at a ceremony here at St. Agnes. (If you invite a Priest or Deacon from another parish, he will be asked to sign the “Wedding Registration Form” acknowledging his responsibility for your wedding and to find a replacement should he be unable to preside and abide by all of the policies delineated by the “Clergy Information Form”.) In either case, we cannot reserve a time or date for your wedding until you have returned the “Wedding Registration Form” along with the deposit. Please do not sign any contract with a reception hall, caterer, etc., until the pastor or Deacon with whom you will meet has confirmed the date and time of your wedding.

**2. The Church.** St. Agnes Church is conveniently located in West Baltimore on Route 40, just one half mile inside the Baltimore Beltway (I-695). Martin’s West Banquet facility is located only a few miles away on the road bordering the church. Many other reception venues are easily accessible from I-695, I-95 and I-70, including those in downtown Baltimore. The church seats approximately 550 people, and is comfortably air-conditioned. There is a parking lot next to the church and the building is accessible to handicapped persons through the side door from the lot near the Activity Center.

**3. Day and Time of Wedding.** Weddings may be scheduled for Friday evenings and on Saturdays between 10:00 and 1:00pm. For a Saturday afternoon wedding, the wedding party and guests must leave the church no later than 3pm.

**4. Wedding Rehearsal.** The wedding rehearsal should be scheduled as soon as possible with the Priest or Deacon, preferably at the time of your first meeting with him. Those attending the rehearsal generally include the bride and groom, all members of the bridal party, the parents of the couple, and any readers or other active participants in the wedding ceremony. Please be aware of the fact that the weekend is a busy time in our parish, and remind your wedding party to be prompt. Musicians generally do not attend the wedding rehearsal. Food and drink are not permitted in the church building at any time.

**5. Marriage Preparation.** As a life-long commitment and a sacrament in our Church, marriage requires a serious level of preparation. The Archdiocese of Baltimore *mandates* all couples to participate in a formal program of preparation. There are three parts to this preparation: meetings with the Priest, meetings with married couples, and a course on Natural Family Planning. For the meetings with married couples there are two main options:

**Sponsor Couple** — a process of several sessions with a selected married couple who will meet with the engaged couple personally over a period of several weeks; or

**Engaged Encounter** — a retreat offering personal attention and guidance for approximately 20 couples, scheduled from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon on various weekends.

Other preparatory programs, such as those suited for a second marriage, are also available. Most programs charge a fee. Marriage preparation is primarily the responsibility of the Priest or Deacon officiating at your wedding. He will discuss these programs with you and help you make the necessary arrangements for participating in them. Upon the completion of a program, the couple will receive a certificate, which should be given to the officiant before the date of the wedding ceremony.

**6. Wedding Music.** Music is an important part of a wedding ceremony. St. Agnes Catholic Church follows the guidelines of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Archdiocese of Baltimore concerning liturgical music. This means that all music used must be religious in nature. Music arrangements for the wedding ceremony must be coordinated with the parish music director. You should contact the parish music director immediately after your initial meeting with the Priest or Deacon.

**7. The Wedding Liturgy.** A couple may choose to be married in either a Wedding Ceremony or a Nuptial Mass. The Wedding Ceremony consists of readings from Scripture, a homily, the exchange of vows, and selected prayers and blessings. It may be officiated by a Priest or Deacon. The Nuptial Mass consists of readings from Scripture, a homily, the exchange of vows, the Eucharistic prayer, the reception of Holy Communion, and selected prayers and blessings. It requires a Priest, but may include a Deacon who may officiate at the exchange of vows.

**8. Photography and Videotaping.** The recording of any wedding ceremony through the use of photography or videotape must respect the sacred nature of the liturgy and must not be a distraction to the ministers, the bridal party, or the congregation. Photos may be taken from the side aisles or the back of church. No photos are allowed in the center aisle, the front of the church, in the sanctuary, or the sacristy. Photographers and videographers may not enter the sanctuary at any time during the ceremony. No additional lights or flash may be used. A stationary video may be set up in the choir loft or the side aisles of the Church.

Photographs may be taken in the church for up to **one half hour** after the ceremony, only if there is sufficient time to do so before the next function. (*Saturday afternoon weddings must leave the church by 3:00 p.m.*) Wedding parties will be asked to leave in order to allow time for subsequent services. The bridal party and the photographers are to maintain a respectful manner, with due regard for the sacred nature of the church, when taking photographs after the ceremony.

## 9. Decorations.

**Liturgical Seasons.** The marriage ceremony occurs within the context of the church's liturgical seasons: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Ordinary Time. Frequently, the church is decorated for these seasons and remains so for the celebration of weddings. Because seasonal decorations may not be altered or removed, please consult with the pastoral staff if church decor may be of concern to you.

**Flowers.** Flowers beautify the sanctuary of the church and enhance the celebration of your wedding. It is customary for the couple to leave the flowers in the church as a gift to the parish community and as a reminder to all parishioners that the sacrament of marriage has recently been celebrated in the church.

*Placement.* Flowers may be placed in the sanctuary. Flowers are not to be placed on the altar of sacrifice.

*Delivery of Flowers.* Please do not assume that the church will be open to accept delivery of flowers at any time. Have your florist contact the parish office during its regular business hours (Monday - Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.) to arrange for a delivery time for the flowers.

*Sharing.* When more than one wedding is to be celebrated on a weekend, we encourage couples to contact each other and to share the cost of flowers in the sanctuary. Please ask the Priest or Deacon to assist you in this regard.

**Candles.** The Catholic ritual for the Sacrament of Matrimony uses strong symbols that are rich in meaning. Unity Candles are not included as a part of the Catholic ritual and thus are not used at St. Agnes.

**Aisle Runner.** The use of an aisle runner is not permitted. These floor coverings are dangerous atop a marble floor especially for women in high heels. In addition, the adhesive used to affix them to the floor damages the floor's finish.

**Pews.** Tape, staples, and metal brackets damage the finish on wooden pews. They are not to be used to affix anything onto the pews. Bows or other simple decorations are

to be fastened to the pews with ribbon ties, protected wire ("twist ties") only. There are 25 rows of pews on either side of the main aisle.

**Additional accoutrements.** No rice, birdseed, confetti, rose petals, or any other item may be thrown inside or outside any building on the parish grounds. Insurance regulations and maintenance problems prohibit this. Balloons may not be released at the church.

**10. Clergy attendance at Rehearsal Dinner/Reception.** The Parish clergy keep a very busy schedule especially on Saturday afternoons. If you would like to invite the Priest or Deacon performing your ceremony to your Rehearsal Dinner, a written invitation should be extended at least one month before the date (e-mail is sufficient). If you would like to invite him to the Wedding Reception, a formal invitation should be sent in the mail.

### **11. Wedding Participants.**

*Readers and Leaders of Prayer.* A member of the bridal party, a member of the family, or a guest may be invited to read from Scripture at the celebration. Please consult with your officiant for assistance. If the wedding includes Mass then the Readers must be practicing Catholics.

*Flower Girls and Ring Bearers.* Flower girls and ring bearers are most reliable if they are at least five years old.

*Ushers.* The ushers should be at the Church ready to seat guests one half-hour before the wedding.

### **12. Required Documents.**

- *Baptismal Certificate.* Each Catholic bride/groom must obtain a newly issued baptismal certificate (issued within six months of the wedding date) from the church of baptism. You may obtain a certificate by contacting the church directly. A baptized non-Catholic bride/groom is asked to provide a photocopy of his or her baptismal certificate.
- *Marriage License.* All couples getting married at St. Agnes Church must obtain a marriage license from the Clerk of the Court for Baltimore County at the County Courts Building, 401 Bosley Avenue, Towson, MD 21204. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The license is valid for ceremonies taking place within Baltimore County after a 48 hour waiting period and expires after six months. No blood tests are required in the State

of Maryland. Please visit:  
[http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/circuit/courts\\_faq/marriage\\_faq.html](http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/Agencies/circuit/courts_faq/marriage_faq.html) for more information.

- A certificate stating that you have completed a Marriage Preparation Program, which is mandatory.
- A certificate stating that you have completed a Natural Family Planning Program, which is mandatory.
- In the case of a marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic, the Priest who prepares you must seek a dispensation from the Diocesan Chancery Office.
- *Other documents.* The Priest or Deacon will assist you in determining whether additional documents are necessary for your marriage.

**13. Punctuality.** It is very important that the wedding rehearsal and celebration begin promptly on time. Courtesy to your guests, the tight schedules of clergy, and the use of parish facilities for subsequent services demand attention to this matter. Late starting times, for example, will almost certainly limit the ability to take photographs after a ceremony. The harder of the two events to start on time is the rehearsal, and we highly recommend that you tell your guests to arrive at the church one half hour before the scheduled rehearsal time.

**14. Stipends.** Recognizing that weddings vary in the resources that they require from the Church, the parish has established the following schedule for stipends:

Wedding Offering for St Agnes Church - **\$850**

Payment schedule:

- \$400 deposit at the time of making arrangements
- balance due one month before the wedding

*The above fee includes \$100 for organist and \$100 for cantor. Subtract \$100 if the couple provides their own cantor.*

The parish will deduct from the Wedding Offering the amount that a person has contributed to St. Agnes/St. William of York Parishes in the 12 months prior to the wedding date, to a minimum offering of: \$450 w/ musician and cantor or \$350 w/musician and no cantor.

If the bride and/or groom still lives with their parents, the amount that the parents contributed to the parish will be deducted. The only way the parish can verify one's contributions is if he/she uses envelopes.

Please make all checks payable to: St. Agnes Church.

**15. Visiting Clergy.** A visiting Priest or Deacon is welcome to witness your wedding at St. Agnes Church. All visiting clergy must be in good standing with their particular (Arch)Diocese or Religious Community. Visiting clergy should follow the guidelines listed on the "Clergy Information Form" which can be obtained from the Parish Office. Stipends for visiting clergy are not included in the above mentioned list of offerings. **Please Note:** Should your clergy become unavailable to celebrate your wedding, the Parish Clergy will not be able to substitute for him.

**16. Cancellations.** Cancellation of church reservations must be made by the bride or groom themselves. All fees paid up to the date of cancellation will be refunded save a \$100 processing fee.