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# ST. AGNES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH

1750 NW 3<sup>RD</sup> AVENUE

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## Designation Report



City of Miami



REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI  
PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE  
ST. AGNES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Passed and  
Adopted on March 18, 2003

Resolution No. 2003-15

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church

Current Name:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church

Location:

1750 NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church  
P.O. Box 2943  
Miami, FL 33101

Present Use:

Religious

Zoning District:

R-3

Tax Folio Number:

01-3136-065-0050

Boundary Description:

Tract 15 of the plat of TOWNPARK SUBDIVISION 5, as recorded in Plat Book 91 at Page 10, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

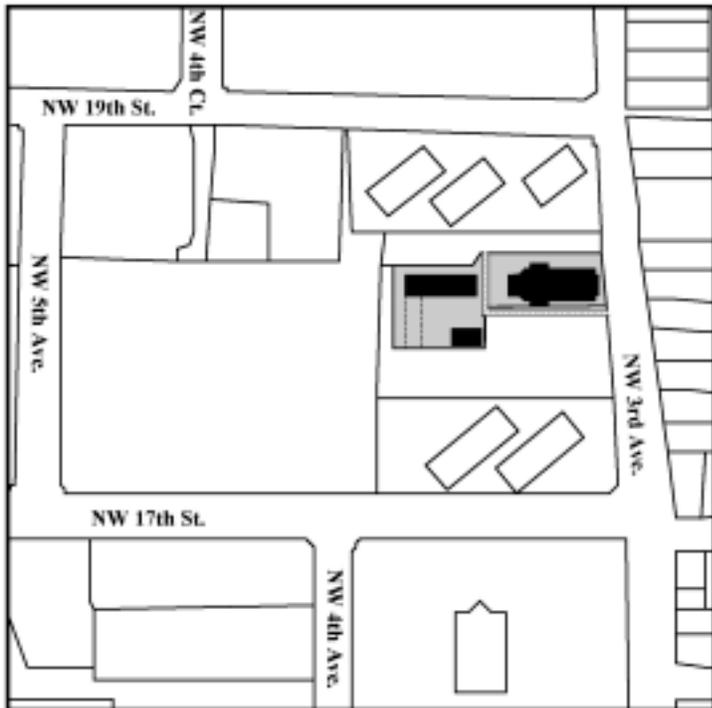
Historic Site

# ST. AGNES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH

1750 NW 3<sup>RD</sup> AVENUE



  
location



  
site plan

## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Specific Dates:

1930

### Architect:

Harold Hastings Mundy

### Builder/Contractor:

Godfrey Scavella, 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phases  
Cumberbatch, 2<sup>nd</sup> phase

### Statement of Significance:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is architecturally significant for its exterior design and interior ornamentation, as well as its association with prominent local architect Harold Hastings Mundy, whose buildings exhibit a Spanish Colonial influence. The building also houses one of Miami's oldest African-American congregations and is significant for its important historical associations with the City's religious and social history.

The exterior of St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is an eclectic blend of styles, including elements of Gothic Revival and Mission. The excellence of the building's design, craftsmanship and detailed articulation is particularly evident in the belfry, central tower, Palladian-influenced windows, shaped parapet and the decorative ornamentation found throughout the interior of the sanctuary. The church roofline is particularly noteworthy for its adaptation to the area's weather by being rounded rather than gabled, thus enabling strong winds to glide over the top of the Church. The ceiling in the sanctuary is one of the most striking architectural elements of the church. It is barrel-vaulted in shape with applied wood trim delineating diamond coffered surfaces, which is unusual for this type of structure.

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church was organized in 1898 after Reverend James O. S. Huntington, a visiting Episcopalian Father Superior, discovered that Anglican Bahamians had no place in which to worship. The first service was held in a private home on NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue near Flagler Street. In 1901, Bahamian worshippers built the first St. Agnes' church building on a large corner lot donated by Henry Flagler at NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and NW 8<sup>th</sup> Street. St. Agnes' was chosen as a name because "so many parishioners identified themselves with St. Agnes' Church in Nassau." The congregation grew continually until the original building could no longer hold the large number of worshippers. Thus in 1923, a foundation was laid at a larger lot at NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and NW 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

Although the new church was begun in 1923, the main building did not see its first service until 1930. Harold Hastings Mundy designed St. Agnes' Episcopal Church, and the men of the congregation supplied the paid labor. During the course of its construction, the Church suffered setbacks due to money shortages and weather, including the hurricane of 1926 that completely leveled the building. The setbacks also necessitated changes to Mundy's original design, including a rounded roof rather than a gabled roof and a belfry instead of a spire. The parish hall housed the congregation until the main building was complete.

Harold Hastings Mundy was one of Miami's most prominent architects in the early part of the twentieth century. Other buildings in the City designed by Mundy include Miami-Edison Senior High School, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and the Coconut Grove Public School. The Mission elements of St. Agnes' exhibit the Spanish Colonial influence typical of a Mundy design.

Since the establishment of the Church, its leaders have led social programs to benefit the community. The Venerable John E. Culmer helped bring about the construction of the Liberty Square Housing Project, one of the first housing projects in the south. St. Agnes' Episcopal Church has served the religious and humanitarian needs of Miami's African-American community for more than 100 years. Membership has waned from its high point in the 1940s when St. Agnes' was the third largest African-American Episcopal congregation in the nation. However, the Church remains an active center in the once vibrant Overtown community, which has lost much of its historic fabric.

#### Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, St. Agnes' Episcopal Church has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City of Miami; possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church has served the religious and humanitarian needs of Miami's African-American community for more than 100 years and remains an active and vibrant center of the Overtown community. Church leaders have led social programs to benefit the community, including The Venerable John E. Culmer, who helped bring about the construction of the Liberty Square Housing Project. The Church

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is an eclectic blend of architectural styles, including elements of Gothic Revival and Mission. The interior of St. Agnes'

Episcopal Church is particularly noteworthy and contains one of its most striking architectural elements, an unusual ceiling that is barrel-vaulted in shape with applied wood trim delineating diamond coffered surfaces.

6. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

Harold Hastings Mundy, a prominent Miami architect in the early part of the twentieth century, designed St. Agnes' Episcopal Church. The Mission elements of St. Agnes' exhibit the Spanish Colonial influence typical of a Mundy design.

7. Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The exterior craftsmanship and detailed articulation of St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is particularly evident in the belfry, central tower, Palladian-influenced windows and shaped parapet. The church roofline is particularly noteworthy for its adaptation to the area's weather by being rounded rather than gabled, thus enabling strong winds to glide over the top of the Church.

### III. DESCRIPTION

#### Present and Original Appearance:

#### Setting:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is located on the block bound by NW 19<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, NW 17<sup>th</sup> Street to the south, NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to the east and NW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the west. The lot occupies the center section of the right side of the block, which is approximately 44,445 square feet. The main entrance is on the west side at NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue behind a metal picket fence. Residential structures and vacant lots surround the church. The parking area for the church is on the south side of the lot.

#### Exterior:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is a one-story-with-loft masonry building that contains elements of both the Gothic Revival and Mission styles of architecture. The church foundation was laid in 1923. The main building was finished in 1930 according to plans provided by Harold Hastings Mundy. The church building has a cruciform shape of reinforced concrete and steel construction capped by a belfry at the east elevation.

The exterior of St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is symmetrical. The exterior fabric is textured stucco. The front façade of the building is the east elevation, which has three bays, the center of which is the belfry. A non-historic round stucco canopy supported by square posts on square stucco piers leads to the main entrance, a set of double doors. The two side bays feature parapets that angle down from the belfry. The recessed windows are stained glass and grouped in a pattern resembling a Palladian window, with a raised masonry surround. There is a belt course along this elevation with rusticated stucco underneath, giving the appearance large square blocks. The corners of this façade have rusticated masonry piers that continue to the roofline and are topped with masonry crosses.

Each side of the square belfry has a wide center arch opening with smaller arch openings on either side. The belfry also has a concrete knee wall with a checkerboard pattern and a shaped parapet with coping.

The north elevation is split into three bays, the long leg of the cross, the arm of the cross and the short head of the cross. There is a small, chamfered, one-story antechamber with a door at the intersection of the head and arm. The exterior fabric is textured stucco. As on the front façade, the recessed windows are stained glass and grouped in a pattern resembling a Palladian window. The lower lights have burglar bars. The belt course continues along this elevation with smooth stucco and square pilasters underneath. The extending arm has a shaped parapet with coping. A non-historic projecting entry is located at this elevation,

featuring a round stucco canopy supported by square posts on square stucco piers. The south elevation is a mirror image of the north elevation with the exception of the antechamber, which does not have a door.

The rear of the building is the west elevation and is very simple. The exterior fabric is textured stucco. The recessed, stained-glass windows are two separate square lights placed vertically underneath a half-moon light. There is no surround; however, the lower lights have burglar bars. The belt course continues along this elevation with smooth stucco and square pilasters underneath. There is a recessed square panel in the center of this façade.

#### Interior:

The interior of the Church is one story in height with a second-story gallery. The main entrance is from the east. The interior is divided into the vestibule, the nave and the sanctuary. The vestibule is split into three sections by arches. There are two symmetrical wooden staircases with wood and concrete handrails along the east wall in the outer sections. These lead up to the gallery and each has a landing where the stained glass windows are placed. Underneath the stairs are open storage areas. Three sets of wooden double doors lead into the sanctuary, one in each section. There are also double doors leading outside located at the north and south ends of the vestibule as well as the center section. The walls are stucco. The original cement floors have been covered with large tiles.

The main body of the Church is the nave, which follows the cruciform plan. It is rectangular with two small arms toward the west end. Within each arm are smaller altars and the organ pipes. The pipes in the right arm are original; however, the ones in the left arm were added in the 1980s. Three aisles split by four columns of wood pews lead up to the altar. The walls are stucco. Originally, the floor was concrete with wood underneath the pews; however, it has been covered with large tiles. The windows, installed in 1946, are stained glass depicting Biblical scenes. Between each window is a pilaster with cartouches on either side depicting the Stations of the Cross. There are concrete and steel ties running the width of the interior from which the hexagon-shaped lights hang.

The ceiling is one of the most striking architectural elements. It is barrel-vaulted in shape with applied wood trim delineating diamond coffered surfaces, which is unusual for this type of structure.

At the east end of the nave above the doors is the loft area. There are three arched openings separating the loft from the main space. It is used for extra seating and storage.

At the west end of the nave is the sanctuary, which follows a traditional church plan. It is split from the main area by a small flight of stairs with a wood and iron welcoming-arms handrail in the center and a large chamfered arch. There is also a carved wood kneeling rail with square posts at the opening. On either side of

the opening are seats facing north/south where the choir sits. There are two speaker's stands on either side of the sanctuary; the pulpit on the left and the lectern on the right. The ornately carved, marble altar was built by the Benzique Brothers for the first St. Agnes' church building at NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The altar was moved into this building in the 1920s. The back wall of the sanctuary has a mural depicting leaders of the Church. While the background was painted in the 1940s, the faces are more recent. The original 1930 Moeller pipe organ, the first built specifically for an African-American Episcopal congregation, sits on the right side of the sanctuary. Much of the ornamentation found throughout the Church was given as gifts by parishioners.

#### Parish Hall:

Built in 1923, the parish hall held services for St. Agnes' congregation until the main church building was completed in 1930. The parish hall is located directly behind the main church building and faces east. It is a one-story, rectangular, Masonry Vernacular building that sits on a continuous concrete block foundation. It has a front-gabled roof covered in composition shingles. The exterior fabric is textured stucco. The fenestration is regularly spaced and the windows have been updated with metal, five-light awning windows covered with burglar bars. Exterior ornamentation includes vents and a large metal cross on the front façade. There was once a partial-width, three-bay front porch on the parish hall with square, concrete supports and a crenellated parapet as well as a small rectangular cupola. However, the building was remodeled in 1949 and both the porch and cupola were removed. There is a one-story, gable-roofed, perpendicular addition on the rear of the parish hall that was built in 1958. A concrete knee wall surrounds the front of the building.

#### Rectory:

The rectory, also built in 1923, housed the priests. It currently serves as an office for the current head clergyman for St. Agnes' Episcopal Church. The rectory is located to the south of the parish hall and faces east. It is a two-story, rectangular, Masonry Vernacular building that sits on a continuous concrete block foundation. It has a front-gabled roof covered in composition shingles. The exterior fabric is textured stucco. The fenestration is regularly spaced and the windows have been updated with metal, four-light awning windows covered with burglar bars. Exterior ornamentation includes vents and a large metal cross on the front façade. There is a front stoop with a concrete knee wall; however, the main entrance is now located on the north elevation.

#### Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The main church building, the parish hall and the rectory all are contributing structures. Also considered as contributing is the interior of the main sanctuary. There are no contributing landscape features on the site.



St. Agnes' Episcopal Church  
1750 NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
East and north façades  
2002



St. Agnes' Church  
1750 NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
East and south façades  
Circa 1940s



St. Agnes' Episcopal Church  
1750 NW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
Interior  
2002

#### IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

##### Present Trends and Conditions:

St. Agnes' Episcopal Church houses one of the oldest congregations in the City of Miami. The Church has played an active role in the African-American community and continues to be an important presence in Overtown. Despite its dwindling congregation, the congregation has maintained and preserved the church building over the years.

##### Conservation Objectives:

Because St. Agnes' Episcopal Church is one of the City of Miami's major landmarks, its continued preservation should be encouraged. Any future alterations or additions to the building should respect its historic character.

V. Bibliography

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