



Old St. Paul's Church
309 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-685-3404
www.osp1692.org

Desiderata and Old St. Paul's

“Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.” So begins the popular poem known as *Desiderata*, which has comforted and inspired millions of people throughout the world. Known for its words of reassurance, *Desiderata* has been reprinted in national magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, been recited at countless weddings and funerals, and was recorded as a hit pop song in 1972.

Over the years, the source of this well-loved poem has been shrouded in mystery. Legend has it that the *Desiderata* was inscribed on a wall at Old St. Paul's Church in the late 17th century. In reality, it was written in 1927 by Max Ehrman, an Indiana attorney, poet, and author. Old St. Paul's is in no way accountable for the poem.

So how did *Desiderata* become associated with Old St. Paul's? To find the answer we must trace back to the season of Lent in Baltimore in the mid 1950's. The Reverend Frederick W. Kates, rector of Old St. Paul's from 1956 to 1961, plays a key role in this story. During Lent it was Father Kates' custom to distribute inspirational poems and quotations to his parishioners. One particular Sunday he placed *Desiderata* in the pews on parish letterhead, which contained the church's founding date of 1692. One can only surmise a visitor then copied the poem, along with the misleading credit line, and distribution began in earnest. Even today it is rare to find a copy of *Desiderata* that fails to include the line “Found in Old St. Paul's Church, Baltimore, Dated 1692.”

The parish has received inquiries on this piece of poetry from every state in the Union and from countries throughout the world. *Desiderata's* popularity endures and so does its mistaken association with Old St. Paul's.

Further inquiries regarding the *Desiderata* should be made to:

The Chrysler Building
405 Lexington Avenue
New York NY 10174-1299
tel: 212-554-7800 fax: 212-554-7700
Pocono Community Pharmacy

Desiderata

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.
And whatever your labors and aspirations,
in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

Desiderata

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Max Ehrmann.

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