

A Devotional for Fr. Lee

Following is the opening devotional at the St. Luke's Vestry meeting of January 16, 2017. This was the final Vestry meeting led by Fr. Lee Stephens, who will retire as Rector at the end of this month.

Today we celebrated the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., whose legacy reminds us over and over again that we are all children of God. And like Jesus himself, he showed us how to reach out in kindness and empathy to all those who are struggling just beyond the fringes of our own comfortable lives.

Today we so realize with a tinge of sadness that this will be the last Vestry meeting led by our Rector of twenty remarkable years, Fr. Lee Stephens. Like Rev. King, Fr. Lee also demonstrated to us daily how to reach out in love...how to be prisms of Christ that radiate beams of hope and help to each other and to our community and the world around us.

We know we can do it, but it will be hard to face the future without Fr. Lee... without Fr. Lee at our side, or a phone call or a few keystrokes away. We are a strong church with solid leadership to confidently face the future.

And most important of all, we know in our deep within our hearts what Jesus told us in that simple, beautiful phrase at the end of the book of Matthew: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The core of this devotional tonight is a prose-poem written 90 years ago by Max Ehrmann, not a well-known poet. But most of us have heard this poem, maybe have a copy of it tucked away someplace.

It is offered to all of you as a guide to refreshing your soul and — if needed — rebuilding your strength for whatever lies ahead. It is especially offered to Fr. Lee as a collective good wish from this Vestry for a long, joyful and fulfilling "semi" retirement.

The poem is "Desiderata" — which is Latin for "things desired." It encapsulates what we desire for all people, but this evening in particular, for our beloved Fr. Lee.

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 was created by American writer Max Ehrmann (1872–1945) who wrote the prose poem "Desiderata" in 1927. In 1956, the Reverend Frederick Kates, rector of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland, included Desiderata in a compilation of devotional materials for his congregation. The compilation included the church's foundation date: "Old Saint Paul's Church, Baltimore AD 1692". Consequently, the date of the text's authorship was (and still is) widely mistaken as 1692, the year of the church's foundation.