

The Existentialist

Newsletter of the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta

470 Candler Park Drive, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30307 • Founded in 1976 •

A Philosophically Based Spiritual Community

Dedicated to Human Liberation

and Founded on Existentialist and Feminist Principles •

A Traditional Existentialist Christmas!



From last year's Traditional Existential Christmas, from left to right: Robert Stewart, Elaine Gale, and Aviva. Photo courtesy of Hank Pfadenhauer.

Come and celebrate the Christmas holiday with us at our Traditional Existentialist Christmas Celebration at the December 20 Celebration of Life. There'll be music, dancing, international intrigue, and lots of love. Share a favorite Christmas memory, bring a favorite treat to share, and sing along as the amazing Aviva plays some of our favorite songs. If you'd like to play an instrument, sing, dance, recite a poem, or otherwise entertain us, please contact Hank Pfadenhauer by email at [**amirtechnicality@gmail.com**](mailto:amirtechnicality@gmail.com)

**First Existentialist
Congregation of
Atlanta**

470 Candler Park Drive,
NE
Atlanta, Georgia 30307
404-378-5570
www.firstexistentialist.org

All Are Welcome
Join us in our
Celebrations of Life on
Sundays at 11:00 a.m.
Children's Program
during Sunday services

Fellowship Minister:
Marsha Mitchiner,
revm@bellsouth.net
Office Administrator:
Edith Covington,
office@firstexistentialist.org

Board of Directors:
D. Patton White, Chair
Bill Read, Treasurer
Stell Simonton,
Recorder
Linda Bell
Elaine Gale
Bill Laney
Hank Pfadenhaur
Mark White
Cindy Lou Who
Newsletter Editor:
Charlene Ball,
mcharleneball@yahoo.com

We are a philosophically based
spiritual community
dedicated to
human liberation
and founded on existentialist
and feminist principles.



Notes From the Board of Directors

By D. Patton White, Board Chair

The Board of Directors met on Monday, November 2, 2015, at 7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary. Presenting a proposal from Primavera pre-school were Julia Weidman and Carla Key. They requested an amendment to lower their rental costs for the remainder of the school year, which the board approved. The board also approved a proposal indicating the location for the framed portrait of Lanier Clance and the Existential Commitment. The board also continued their visioning conversation, this time around the topic of finances. All agreed that a goal in the coming years should be to create an endowment fund that could support the organization. Mark White agreed to purchase a lavalier microphone for use during Sunday Celebrations of Life by speakers. Bill Laney provided an update on costs and time line for the automatic door opener. Marsha Mitchiner and Edith Covington shared staff reports, and several guilds reported on activity in the past month. The next board meeting will be on Monday, December 7, and all are welcome to attend. ~

Musicians Wanted

The First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta is seeking musicians to play on Sunday mornings. We are looking for musicians who can lead and accompany the congregation in four congregational songs as well as share a brief performance of another piece of music.

We pay a \$75 honorarium per Sunday. If you are interested in being included in the pool of musicians for our Sunday Celebrations of Life, held every Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., please email Program Guild Chair D. Patton White at patton@beacondance.org or call him at 404.441.9243.

Community News & Activities

--The Book Discussion Group meets on Sunday, December 20, after the COL. We will discuss Chapter 6 of *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Joy DeGruy. All are welcome.

--Saralyn is helping start a chapter in Atlanta of OLOC (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change). Minimum age is 50, so let her know if you're interested.

--Arlene would be happy to know of anyone whose kids need tutoring.

--Nathaniel will be moving to a private care home on Moreland Ave. in December. For more information about him, contact Lorraine.

ONGOING:

--First E Liberation Ukulele Group meets 1st, 3rd, and 4th Wednesday evenings. 7:30 start time. Instruction available once monthly. All levels of expertise are welcome. Call Wilj at 404-626-4763 for information.

Guild Reports

Program Guild ***By Charlene Ball***

The Program Guild met on Tuesday, November 3, at 6:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary to plan the Sunday Celebrations of Life in January, February, and March 2016. We're pleased to announce that the inspiring Rev. Angela Denise Davis will be speaking again in January and March. Our longtime friend Rev. Duncan Teague will return in both January and February, and Charles Stephens will speak in February. First E members Elvie Bagalot and Dr. Saralyn Chesnut will speak on January 10 and March 6, respectively. We will also have a first-time guest speaker: Anthony Knight, a historian who recently planned events for the History Center at the Cyclorama.

In December, Rev. Erin Swenson will speak on December 6, and Rev. Kim Palmer will return on December 13. On December 20, First E member Hank Pfadenhaur will return with a Traditional Existential Christmas. And rounding out December, Mona Reeves will return on the 27th, speaking about Kwanzaa.

The Guild has a new member, Dr. Saralyn Chesnut. We now have 6 members: Patton White (chair of the Guild), Linda Bell, Charlene Ball, Saralyn Chesnut, Bill Laney, and Hank Pfadenhauer.

The next meeting of the Program Guild will be on Tuesday, February 9, 2016, in the Sanctuary at 6:00 p.m. All members and friends are welcome to attend. ~

Membership Guild ***By Charlene Ball***

The Membership Guild sponsored a delicious potluck on November 1 at our Day of the Dead service that about 25 people attended. The Guild gave its yearly presentation on Sunday, November 22, and Mary Howard was the presenter. The Guild continues to explore ways to increase membership, continues to welcome new members and newcomers, by providing greeters at each COL. The Guild also coordinates the openers, who open the building, start the coffee, turn on the lights and heat or air conditioning, and put out song-books and tambourines. The Membership Guild is composed of Elaine Gale, Carol Sandiford, Hank Pfadenhauer, Robert Stewart, Bill Laney, Mary Howard, and Wilj Sturkey. The Openers are Elaine, Hank, Wilj, Stell Simonton, and Andy Weiskoff. If anyone would like to know more about the Membership Guild, participate in setting up a kiddush, opening, or greeting, contact Wilj at *cincode-mayo55@comcast.net* or Elaine at *ergale@hotmail.com*. ~

Social Justice Guild ***By Linda Bell***

The Social Justice Guild continues to sponsor the reading of Joy DeGruy's *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* and recently completed the discussion of Chapter 5, with our members and others. The next discussion—of Ch. 6, remainder of the book—will take place after the COL on Dec. 20. At this meeting, we will decide which book to read next. We will meet downstairs after the COL. Members and friends are welcome to attend.

Members remain active in various social justice projects, including writing for the Social Justice Corner in *The First Existentialist Newsletter*, sponsoring the Book Discussion Group, and taking part in community social justice activities. ~

Whenever one person stands up and says, "Wait a minute, this is wrong," it helps other people do the same. ~ Gloria Steinem

October 2015 Finance Report

<u>2015 Cash Flow</u>	<u>Operating</u>	<u>Designated</u>
Total Income	62,490	2,819
Total Expenses	(58,200)	(6,671)
Net thru October 31	4,290	(3,852)

Fund Types & Names Account Balances on October 31

<unaudited>

2015 General Operating Account 4,290

Designated Operating Funds 22,847

Use Where Needed Fund	1,461
Sanctuary Accessibility	14,134
Leadership Development	750
Community Garden/Labyrinth	32
Building & Grounds	486
Woodland Sanctuary	1,343
Minister's Discretionary	1,190
Social Justice	1,250
Attic Insulation Fund	1,250
Children's Program	692
Music Fund	255

Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan Fund (\$8K) 7,566

Total First E Funds 34,698

Old Stone Church History Project 1,536

*That's what I consider true generosity.
You give your all, and yet you always
feel as if it costs you nothing. ~ Simone
de Beauvoir*

FUND OF THE MONTH CLUB

The Fund of the Month is the Building and Grounds Fund. Please write "Building and Grounds Fund" on your check. ~

2016 Pledge Campaign

First E's 2016 Members and Friends Pledge Campaign started at Thanksgiving and will go through December with wrap-up to follow in January. Everyone is encouraged to please reply by Dec. 31, 2015. The 2016 pledge form is available on the First E website and also in the sanctuary on the literature rack. Or we can email a form to you. Please pledge your 2016 support now in Dec. 2015.

Thank You, The Finance Committee

If you would like to become a member or friend of First E, please fill out a pledge form located on the sanctuary literature rack or download the form from our website at <http://www.firstexistentialist.org>.

Guns are not allowed on the property belonging to the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta.

Social Justice Corner

Demagogues Yesterday! Demagogues Today! Demagogues Forever?

By Libby Ware

I first heard the term "demagogue" in 1968 when George Wallace ran for president. This word is defined as: (1) a leader or orator who espouses the cause of the common people; (2) a leader or orator who appeals to popular desires or prejudices to further personal desires; a rabble rouser (Oxford English Dictionary). Generally, the second definition is meant when "demagogue" is used. What's interesting is how the first definition, similar to populism, often goes with the second definition.

For instance, George Wallace had a populist platform. He favored an increase in social security payments, and as governor supported trade unions as well as starting trade schools and also community colleges throughout Alabama to prepare students for four-year universities. After he lost the 1958 gubernatorial election against the segregationist candidate, he vowed to never be outdone as a segregationist. After this he went on to prominently oppose desegregation. This began his career as a demagogue, standing outside the University of Alabama to prohibit African American students from entering and his famous speech that included "Segregation Now, Segregation Tomorrow, Segregation Forever." Also, in this speech he spoke of a duty to senior citizens, farmers, and the laboring man, and the need to increase markets and income, and the need of education for all.

[Tom Watson's] inflammatory rhetoric was partially responsible for sparking the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906

Tom Watson of Georgia also was a populist leader. As a legislator, he supported the elimination of Georgia's convict leasing program, favored taxes to support public education, and advocated for poor farmers and sharecroppers, both black and white. When he ran for the U. S. Congress, Watson knew that he couldn't win without the support of black voters, and he condemned lynching and supported black enfranchisement. However he changed his stance by 1904 and advocated for disenfranchisement of blacks and no longer defined populism in racially inclusive terms. His inflammatory rhetoric was partially responsible for sparking the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, where whites hunted down and killed black citizens. Governor Hoke Smith rewarded Watson's support of his campaign by leading the successful adoption of a constitutional amendment denying the vote to Black Georgians.

Although Wallace and Watson came out of populist backgrounds inclusive of all races, they are now mostly known as segregationist demagogues. In our present era, racist language is often coded, but we now have politicians who are using blatantly anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric. In this way, they are reviving the art of fiery speeches appealing to fears and prejudices. Already followers of a particular candidate have turned against someone whom the candidate asked to leave the building. What could happen if audience members get riled up and leave the meeting going after those who were denigrated? In the past, Irish, German, and Italian immigrants were feared and hated, and Catholics and Jews have been maligned in this country. This new hate speech is scary and unfortunately shows us that "the past is never dead, it's not even past," as William Faulkner said. ~

"The past is never dead. It's not even past." William Faulkner

Minister's Corner

By Rev. Marsha Mitchiner, First E Fellowship Minister

Caring thoughts go out to:

Linda Sheldon in the loss of her partner, Leigh McClelland. Linda and Leigh were members of the Atlanta Feminist Chorus and friends of many at First E.

Nathaniel Jones, who is recovering and will soon (hopefully) be out of rehab and into a safe new place to live. It's been great to have him back at First E on Sundays.

Mark White and family as they help his son who has been ill.

The people of the world--especially Syria, Paris, Beirut, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel, the list is endless--who are suffering the senseless violence of hate and fear. ~

Holiday Giving--Lost and Found Youth and Intown Community Ministry

For our holiday giving we will support the Lost and Found Youth and Intown Community Ministry, both serving the homeless.

WHAT WE NEED:

New or gently used warm coats, jackets, sweaters, sweat shirts, socks, caps, scarves and gloves.

We also are providing "survival kits." Get some baggies, fill quart-size ones with essentials such as sample/small-size toothpaste and brush, soap, shampoo, antibiotic cream, bandaids, lip balm, cough drops, waterless hand cleaner, comb, brush, razor, tampons, sanitary pads, snacks, etc. Then place the quart bags inside a gallon one. If you have cloth grocery bags you can put the gallon bag in it. Items can be found at the Dollar Store as well as drugs and grocery stores, etc.

Get the family, friends, neighbors together for a "bag it" party and see how many kits you can make up. Bring the finished product to First E by December 20, and we will deliver it to these organizations for them to distribute.

Thanks for your giving and caring, Marsha ~

Community News & Activities ~ continued from page 2

--Geek Chorus meets on Second Wednesdays. Bring your favorite beverage to share, love offering to First E, and musical instruments to pluck, bang or strum.

COMMUNITY:

--Georgia WAND celebrates the holidays on Thursday, December 3, from 6-9 p.m. at the the Lakehouse at Avondale Estates, 59 Lakeshore Dr., Avondale Estates, 30002. Bring a potluck dish to share.

--Submissions and news for the January Newsletter are due to Charlene by Sunday, December 20. Send to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. Contact Robert Stewart with your news and activities for his weekly e-newsletter: robertstewart369@gmail.com. ~

November 29: Native American Giveaway

By Dr. Sharon Mathis

On November 29, Dr. Sharon Mathis will lead the Traditional Existentialist Giveaway Ceremony. This ceremony celebrates our connections with each other and the earth. It's modeled on Native American giveaways which are used on many kinds of occasions to bond the community in all its relations: to self as giver, family, tribe, and place--from animals to rocks.

In our giveaway each person is invited to bring an item with personal meaning. It might be meaningful because it's beautiful, because you liked it, because it holds a memory, or anything else you define as meaningful. If you have more than one, please bring it so others without one could choose to participate.

Children are welcome! They'll be our "Agents of the Universe," giving away the items among us as they please. It's as random as it gets.

There will be drumming, singing, some thoughts on gratitude and giving, and poetry about the earth.

In a time when fear is slamming doors:

"My friends, let us give thanks for Wonder.

Let us give thanks for the Wonder of Life."

Rabbi Rami Shapiro ~

Dr. Sharon Mathis

Sharon Mathis is a psychologist; playwright and solo performer, and a founding member of the Congregation. Her most recent play *The Liars' Child* won an Ethel Woolson Award for best plays of 2013, and her solo show *He/She and Me* was produced in New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York. ~

This program information was left out of the November newsletter by mistake, so we are including it in December's. Apologies to Dr. Sharon Mathis, speaker; D. Patton White, facilitator; and William "Bill" Chelton, accompanist. ~

In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer path, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after truth. ~ Mahatma Gandhi

Speakers in December

December 6: Rev. Erin Swenson

Rev. Erin Swenson is an Atlanta minister, psychotherapist, and human rights activist focusing on the transgender and gender non-conforming community. Her ordination as a Presbyterian minister was upheld by the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta in October, 1996, making Erin the first known mainstream minister to make a gender transition while in ordained office. Since then she has spoken and taught at universities, seminaries, and faith gatherings across the US and UK. She will speak on December 6 on the topic "Human Rights and Gender Identity." ~

December 13: Rev. Kim Palmer

"**From the birth of Jesus to the return of the sun** after the equinox to prayers answered in sickness and death, the real miracle is rooted not in the supernatural but in the existential." Rev. Kim Palmer, who will speak on December 13 on "The REAL Miracle," came to Unitarian Universalism in 2004, sparking an evaluation of the value and impact of her life and her work as an environmental engineer. Four years later, her mother's death and a months-long period of caring for her in a nursing home illuminated an unexpected call to ministry. Rev. Kim was ordained by the Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North Congregation where she is an affiliated community minister. She currently serves as the oncology chaplain at Emory University Hospital and enjoys guest preaching at area congregations. ~

December 20: A Traditional Existential Christmas with Hank Pfadenhauer and Others

"**A Traditional Existential Christmas**" has become a **First E tradition**. Join First E member Hank Pfadenhauer and friends for a traditional Christmas celebration--Existentialist style. (See Page 1 for more information). Hank Pfadenhauer became a member of First E in 1981. He is an Army veteran. ~

December 27: Mona Reeves

Mona Reeves is an artist of life and love. She loves the arts—creative and expressive—and is actively engaging in the arts, day by day. She works as a professional art model and has been the subject of several award-winning pieces. Her art extends to her five children who are all musically gifted; two of her daughters are visual artists while all three are excellent writers. Her oldest son is busy at work mastering the guitar and songwriting while he is away at college. Her youngest son is a phenomenon to watch on the gymnastics floor.

Mona's main objective is to Be Love. For over a decade, she has been focused on how to break down the barriers between people, especially those related to racism. She uses Facebook as a medium to connect people with social justice tools to create significant change. She is in the midst of major life transitions and loving every moment of the beautiful mosaic her life is becoming.

Mona is available for public speaking engagements, poetry readings, dance performances, music shows as well as art modeling. Check out monareeves.com for details.

Mona Reeves will speak on December 27 on "Kugichagulia: Self-Determination--Making my Life Matter." ~

December 2015 Sunday Celebrations of Life

December 6 Human Rights and Gender Identity

Speaker: Rev. Erin Swenson

Facilitator: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut

Accompanist: Alan Dynin

December 13 Recognizing the REAL Miracle

Speaker: Rev. Kim Palmer

Facilitator: Dr. Sharon Mathis

Accompanist: Amy Wilson

December 20 A Traditional Existential Christmas

Speaker: Hank Pfadenhauer and Others

Facilitator: Hank Pfadenhauer

Accompanist: Aviva and the Flying Penguins

December 27 Kugichagulia - Self-Determination:

Making My Life Matter

Speaker: Mona Reeves

Facilitator: D. Patton White

Accompanist: William "Bill" Chelton

*I know what I have given you. I do not know what you
have received. ~ Antonio Porchia*

The Back Page

Members and Friends Speak

An excerpt from **Secrets of the Universe: Scenes from the Journey Home**

By **Scott Russell Sanders**



It is rare for any of us, by deliberate choices, to sit still and weave ourselves into a place, so that we know the wildflowers and rocks and politicians, so that we recognize faces wherever we turn, so that we feel a bond with everything in sight. The challenge, these days, is to be somewhere as opposed to nowhere, actually to belong to some particular place, invest oneself in it, draw strength and courage from it, to dwell not simply in a career or a bank account but in a community.

Once you commit yourself to a place, you begin to share responsibility for what happens there. When PCBs leak into the water or dioxides into the air, it is your water and your air that is polluted. The parks, the schools, the hospitals, the government, all are yours to fret over. When requesting donations for team or the purchase of you have to reach for yourself in a place, and to your neighbors as to kinfold. When some of them pull up stakes and leave, as friends from down the street have just done — to Washington, D.C., where the husband will work at the Smithsonian, the wife will teach Spanish, and the two daughters will sprout into mysterious teenagers — you grieve. If a local woman is raped, a child goes hungry, a man is denied a job because of the shade of his skin, you are implicated. You must answer to the needs of a community, and if you neglect those needs, as I too often do, slipping back into the hammock of private life, you eat the sour bread of guilt.

Once you commit yourself to a place, you begin to share responsibility for what happens there.

kids knock at your door, the band or the debate a limestone rhinoceros, your wallet. Entangle you become attached

No wonder our songs tell us we gotta keep travelin' on. Who needs to shoulder the weight of a community when our own skins weight so heavily? The impulse to hit the road is not only a hunger for new territory; it is often a flight from trouble. Daniel Boone is famous for having moved on whenever he could see the smoke from a neighbor's fire. Many of us move on to avoid cleaning up the ashes from the fires we ourselves have set. ~

Excerpted by Rev. Angela Denise Davis

*Happy Holidays from All of Us at the First
Existentialist Congregation*

The Existentialist is published monthly. Deadline for the January 2016 newsletter is December 20. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.