

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 •

"Favorite People and Places" Photographs" by Glen Lopez



"Even dread spread" by Glen Lopez. More on page 8.

**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:
Rick Westbrook,
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Board of Directors:
D. Patton White, Chair
Bill Read, Treasurer
Stell Simonton,
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*We are a philosophically based
spiritual community
dedicated to
human liberation
and founded on existentialist
and feminist principles.*



Notes From the Board

By D. Patton White, Board Chair

The First E Board of Directors met on Monday, March 2. The board discussed the initial agenda items for the upcoming Annual Congregational Meeting of First E, as well as hearing from Libby Ware about the Red Tent event that is scheduled for Saturday, March 28. The board continued to discuss the accessibility update to the building and will present reports on this as well as other activities at the Annual Meeting. The board is also happy to report that we are in a strong financial position at this time. ~

***Don't Forget to Attend
the 2015 Annual Congregational Meeting
on April 12!!***

***We will vote in Board Members for the upcoming year and hear
updates on the Sanctuary Accessibility Project and other matters.
If you pledged by March 12,
you are eligible to vote at this meeting. ~***

Community News & Activities

--**Congregational Annual Meeting will be April 12.** Pledge Drive is over, but you can still renew your membership for 2015.

First E Liberation Ukulele Group meets 1st, 3rd, and 4th Wednesday evenings for fun, practice & community (at First E around 7:30 start time, including instruction available once monthly. All levels of expertise are welcome. 404-626-4763 for more info Wilj).

The Bi-Racial History Project has a Challenge Grant for \$500, so any donation you make will be matched. Please see Edi if you need any guidance on how to do it.

--**First E Third Friday Film Series** presents *Anne Braden: American Patriot* on Friday, April 17, at 7:30 p.m. at First E. Donations \$1-\$10.00; no one turned away. Refreshments available. Discussion after the film.

--**Geek Chorus meets on Second Wednesdays.** Bring your favorite beverage to share, love offering to First E for allowing us to use the space, and musical instruments to pluck, bang or strum.

Guild Reports

Membership Guild *by Wilj Sturkey-Mercado*

On March 29, the Membership Guild will host a potluck. We invite everyone to attend and bring a dish to share, from entrees to desserts. This is always a fun event and it gives us an opportunity to get to know each other better and to meet new people.

We are excited to learn that Edith Covington is working on a new First E Member and Friends Directory. The publishing date is not yet known but we are looking forward to it.

Marsha Mitchiner will offer an Orientation for new members and any interested parties on March 29, right after the potluck.

We are happy to have David Nelson Hooker as our newest First E member. He has outlined some plans he has to help us increase our membership.

We are looking forward to our Congregational Annual Meeting will be April 12. We hope to see all of you there!

If anyone would like to know more about the Membership Guild, to participate in setting up a kiddush or opening or greeting, contact Wilj at cincodemayo55@comcast.net or Elaine at ergale@hotmail.com. ~

Program Guild *by Charlene Ball*

The Program Guild planned the COLs for April, May, and June at our last meeting. On April 5, our speaker will be Rev. Duncan Teague with Patton White facilitating. Rev. Marsha Mitchiner will speak on April 12, the day we have our Annual Congregational Meeting when we will elect our Board for 2015, and Saralyn Chesnut will facilitate. Sharon Mathis will speak on April 19, and Bill Laney will facilitate, while Dr. Jean Heinrich will provide accompaniment and special music. On April 26, special guest Charles Stephens will speak, and Charlene Ball will facilitate.

We will have a potluck on April 9 from 6:30 to 8:30 at Patton's. This will be our third potluck, and we welcome First E members and friends to come and bring a dish.

Our next quarterly meeting will be Tuesday, May 19, at 6:00 p.m. at First E. We usually meet upstairs in the Sanctuary. Members and friends of First E are invited to attend. ~

Community News & Activities ~ continued from page 2

--For updates about **Moral Mondays in Georgia**, please drop a note to Lorraine Fontana at tana44@hotmail.com.

--**Dr. Bombay's presents a monthly Indian dinner** on the last Monday of each month to help girls in Darjeeling, India, to remain in school. Reservations are required. The dinner is \$20.

--**Lost-n-Found Thrift and Consignment Store**, 2585 Chantilly Drive, is open M-Sat 10-5; Sundays noon-6.

--**Dinner Party & Fund Raiser for Atlanta Grandmothers for Peace April 11 @ 555 Hardendorf Avenue**, Atlanta, 6-9 PM, suggested donation \$10, RSVP by April 1 to Anne Hughes, hughes.annef@gmail.com, or to Bobbie Paul, 404-589-9827.

--**The Rosin Sisters will host a House Concert on May 23.** Contact home-owners Les & Dee Reel at tradhouse9@gmail.com if you would like to attend. Barbara Panter, Ann Whitley, Jan Smith (and friends)

--**Submissions and news for the May Newsletter** are due to Charlene by Sunday, April 19. Send Board and Guild reports and news items to mcharleneball@yahoo.com.

--**Contact Robert Stewart** with your news and activities for his weekly e-newsletter: robertstewart369@gmail.com -- ****NOTE CHANGE IN EMAIL.** ~

February 2015 Finance Report

<u>2015 Cash Flow</u>	<u>Operating</u>	<u>All Other</u>
Total Income	15,178	833
<u>Total Expenses</u>	(10,122)	(81)
Net thru February 28	5,056	752

Fund Types & Names Account Balances on February 28
< unaudited >

<u>General Operating Account</u>	5,056
<u>Designated Operating Funds</u>	27,447

Use Where Needed Fund	1,461
Sanctuary Accessibility	18,384
Leadership Development	750
Community Garden/Labyrinth	388
Building & Grounds	111
Woodland Sanctuary	1,669
Minister's Discretionary	912
Social Justice	1,305
Attic Insulation Fund	1,250
Children's Program	472
Music Fund	745

Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan Fund (\$8K) 6,065

Total First E Funds 38,568

Old Stone Church History Project 1,036

FUND OF THE MONTH CLUB

*The ongoing Fund of the Month is the **Sanctuary Accessibility Fund**. This fund at present contains \$18,384.00. Please write "Accessibility Fund" on your check. ~*

*Third Friday Film Series
presents
Anne Braden: Southern Patriot
Friday, April 17, 2015
Doors open 7:00 pm – film starts at 7:30 pm
Popcorn and refreshments available
Donations welcome - \$1 to \$10 sliding scale
No one turned away
Sponsored by First E's Social Justice Guild
Discussion after the film
Visit us on Facebook!*

Result of 2015 Membership Campaign

By Bill Read, Treasurer

By March 12th, a total of 57 people had signed up as Members of First Existentialist Congregation for 2015. These people are eligible to vote at our annual congregational meeting on April 12 and to serve on the First E. Board. Another 51 people are listed as Friends in 2015 rather than Members. Contact information may be found in First E's *2015 Directory of Members and Friends* (soon to be available). ~

*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*

**Guns are not allowed on the property
belonging to the First Existentialist
Congregation**

Social Justice Corner

Selma's Amazing Grace

By Franklin Abbott

Two weeks ago I was in Selma for the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights March. Every year for the past decade, my dear old friend from high school and college days, Martha Ham, and I take a road trip. She and I are both clinical social workers and we created workshops every May for five years. We always traveled after the workshop to some amazing place in the Four Corners area of the Southwest. We visited the Grand Canyon (sneaking in before it was officially open for the season), Zion, Moab, Salt Lake City, and the Waterpocket Fold where the world is literally turned upside down.

Montgomery is the capital of Alabama and the capitol building is its centerpiece. White marble steps and columns, set on a hill, surrounded by other white marble state office buildings, it looks grand. This is where Dr. King spoke when the voting rights marchers made it the 49 miles from Selma to Montgomery. Martha was a child living with her mother and brother in Montgomery at the time. Her mother told her that Gov. George C. Wallace had closed the state government that day and told everyone to avoid downtown. Her mother, who worked for the state welfare department and had the day off, drove to a hill overlooking the capitol and watched the marchers as they entered Selma. The Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where Dr. King served as minister is in spitting distance of the capitol. An old red brick church on a corner, it serves as a stark counterpoint to all the white marble that surrounds it. What is stunning about Montgomery though is not all the white marble in a tiny downtown enclave but the urban devastation that engulfs it. All around the capitol precinct is decay and dereliction. Downtown Montgomery is devastated by poverty and neglect.

Congressman John Lewis, who I am proud to claim as my U.S. Representative, was barely an adult when he led the first march over the Edmund Pettis Bridge fifty year ago that day.

Selma is hard to describe because we could not move freely. We couldn't drive in over the Edmund Pettis Bridge because it had been closed for the festivities. As soon as we walked into town we found out that we had to have tickets to see the President and so we joined a long line that snaked around several blocks . . . slowly. No one in the line seemed to know where the line was going or how long before the President would speak. And so we waited and walked a few steps and waited and walked a few steps.

After a couple of hours we walked out into a cordoned off section of downtown Selma (lots of storefronts with no stores) that faced the Edmund Pettis Bridge. We stood there for some time before we could see the Obamas enter the area via a Jumbotron. First the Obama girls, then their parents. The crowd was wild in its welcome. We stood beside an African American man in his fifties and his two teenaged children who drove down from Birmingham. He told us about how Selma had been capital of Alabama once upon a time because it was a river town on the Alabama River which flowed under the Edmund Pettis Bridge. He said he came because he wanted his kids to see the President (like all teenagers they were standing a little too distant from their dad to avoid parental cooties). Finally the parade of dignitaries ascended the platform. We cheered the Obamas, who came last after George and Laura Bush. The African American Mayor of Selma welcomed us. The African American Congresswoman for the district also welcomed us. And the white Governor of Alabama showed up and made a speech about how everything was all better now in Alabama. He was booed.

Even though President Obama gave a magnificent speech, he could not outshine the man who presented him to the people who had come to Selma to hear him. Congressman John Lewis, who I am proud to claim as my U.S. Representative, was barely an adult when he led the first march over the Edmund Pettis Bridge fifty year ago that day. The President remarked that when John Lewis woke up on that day fifty years ago he had no idea of what history had in store for him. It proved doubly true. John Lewis could not anticipate

Continued on back page.

Speakers in April

Charles Stephens

Charles Stephens is the Director of the Counter Narrative Project and co-editor of the anthology *Black Gay Genius: Answering Joseph Beam's Call*. He was the Conference Coordinator for the 2014 "Whose Beloved Community? Black Civil and LGBT Rights Conference" hosted by Emory University, and in 2013 he served as a Grand Marshall for the Atlanta LGBT Pride Parade.

Charles has been a Co-Chair of the Emory University Hope Clinic Community Advisory Board, led the AID Atlanta sponsored social marketing campaign targeting young black gay and bisexual men called "From Where I Stand," and as a college student co-founded BlackOut, a Black LGBT student organization at Georgia State University. He has worked with such organizations as the Ford Foundation, Georgia Equality, AIDS United, and AID Atlanta as a consultant, providing strategic guidance and thought-partnership around program development and policy advocacy with black gay and bisexual men.

Charles has been a fellow at the CDC Institute for HIV Prevention Leadership and the Black AIDS Institute Community Mobilization College. He was selected by the National Youth Advocacy Coalition in 2009 to present on his work at their "Best Practices Working With LGBT Youth of Color Summit." In 2012 he was invited to present on LGBT youth issues at the White House LGBT Summit held in Atlanta.

His work in Black LGBT politics and culture has been honored by PFLAG, ZAMI (which awarded him their Marlon Riggs Social Justice Award) and Unity Fellowship Church which honored him with their Community Award.

Charles has a Huffington Post Gay Voices blog, his writing has also appeared in the *Georgia Voice*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Lambda Literary Review*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Alternet*, and *WireTap*. He will speak at First E on April 26 on "Our History is Each Other: Collective Memory and Personal Transformation." ~



Charles Stephens



Rev. Duncan Teague

Rev. Duncan Teague

Rev. Duncan Teague is an ordained Unitarian Universalist (UU) Minister who is a longtime friend of First E. He served on our Interim Ministry Team with Rev. Marsha Mitchiner and Rev. Janna Nelson upon the retirement of Rev. Lanier Clance. He has more than twenty years of work in HIV/AIDS advocacy, prevention, education and research and is a recognized leader in the GLBTQ community. He is happily married to his husband, David Thurman. Duncan will speak on, "Circular Love That Returns Again and Again" on April 5. ~

Sharon Mathis

Sharon Mathis is a psychologist, playwright and solo performer, and 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. She will speak at First E on April 19 on "All My Relations: Celebrating Earth Day." ~



Sharon Mathis



Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

Growing up in middle Georgia, Marsha was, like other members of her family, an active member of her church. She became disillusioned in her teen years when the actions and answers to her questions posed to the minister and other denomination leadership/followers were not in agreement with the Christian messages she had been taught. She left religious institutions but felt a need to find a community of individuals seeking answers without dogma. She immediately felt she had found her home when she came to First E in 1980. She became an active member, joined the Ministerial Training Program with Rev. Lanier Clance, and was ordained by First E in 1993. She served with Rev. Clance as Associate Minister until his retirement in 2000 and now serves as Fellowship Minister. Marsha believes in individual truth, responsibility and the power of community. She will speak on April 12 on "How Can I Keep From Singing." ~

When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realize, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can't eat money. ~ Alanís Obom-sawin, filmmaker (b. 1932)

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

"Favorite People and Places" Photography Exhibit ~ by Glen Lopez

Glen Lopez says, "These are some of my favorite people and places that I have captured over the past several years. Some of these are new, and some of these are over five years old. As they say in photography, my ideal photograph is one that I captured the moment. I hope these images stand up to that standard."

"Favorite People and Places: Photographs by Glen Lopez" will be up on the walls of First Existentialist Congregation from April 12 through May 24. Opening will be on Sunday, April 12 after the service. ~

Right: "boy and dog wax n facts"



Left: "CADLACKMOW"

April 2015 Sunday Celebrations of Life

- April 5* *Circular Love that Returns Again and Again*
Speaker: Rev. Duncan Teague
Facilitator: D. Patton White
Accompanist: William "Bill" Chelton
- April 12* *How Can I Keep From Singing*
Speaker: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner
Facilitator: Saralyn Chesnut
Accompanist: Alan Dynin
Annual Congregational Meeting to Follow
- April 19* *All My Relations: Celebrating Earth Day*
Speaker: Sharon Mathis
Facilitator: Bill Laney
Accompanist: Dr. Jean Heinrich
- April 26* *Our History is Each Other: Collective Memory
and Personal Transformation*
Speaker: Charles Stephens
Facilitator: Charlene Ball
Accompanist: Charli Vogt

*As a congregation, we pledge: to explore and take seriously
our central values of freedom, justice and responsibility. ~
From 1st Existentialist's Commitment Statement*

The Back Page

Members and Friends Speak Out

Selma's Amazing Grace, by Franklin Abbott ~ continued from page 5



the wrath of white supremacy that was waiting for him and the foot soldiers on the other side of the bridge nor could he know that on that very day fifty years later that he would be introducing the first African American president of the United States in front of the bridge where he had had his skull cracked fifty years earlier. We all wept for him, for ourselves, for unborn generations.

At the Flame Awards that evening, I saw two women sitting alone at a table and asked if we could join them. Peggy Washington was a proud member of the committee who organized the 50th Anniversary. She told us she had gone to the mass meetings before the first attempt to march on Bloody Sunday. She said when she and a friend arrived at Brown Chapel for the march (aged seventeen, many of the foot soldiers were young—if they had been older they would have lost their jobs and their families would have been indigent) they were sent home because they were dressed "too cute." She ran home to change clothes and by the time she got back the carnage had happened.

The next day, without official guidance, serendipity took us into Selma and to Brown Chapel. It was almost 3:00 before the beleaguered pastor introduced the speaker for the day, Al Sharpton. I was feeling impatient to get on with the march. I was hoping Al Sharpton would feel my pain and keep it short. He knocked the ball out of the ballpark with his oratory. He was a cross between Cicero and William Jennings Bryan. Where Obama could only probe, Sharpton poked. Where all the politicians put together could only wield slogans, Sharpton sang spirituals and brought the crowd inside and outside the church into a crescendo of glory hallelujahs.

The poor Mayor of Selma had to break the news to the thousand or so of us waiting for the march to begin outside Brown Chapel. He said, "I can't tell you not to go, but downtown is so full that there is no place to go." It was a public safety issue. Twenty thousand people live in Selma. One hundred thousand had come to march. Martha looked at me and said, "let's go back to Atlanta."

We got back to Atlanta, really too tired to think. Martha and I never run out of things to talk about. Having Alabama in common is a source of psychic kinship. Neither of us has a doubt about our ancestors' racism or how they kept us alive with their love. The next morning I took Martha to Georgia State University to do an oral history. That afternoon I took a long nap with no apologies. Introvert that I am, huge crowds, long lines, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, are all depleting. I live a life of ample solitude, and so I have some Zen in the bank. I spent it all on the road to and from Selma. And yet I do not feel depleted. I feel I got more than I gave.

Poor little Selma accommodated five times its population; and no one was hurt, nothing got out of bounds, attendance was an exclamation point! two presidents showed up!! and just for a magic 48 hours Selma mattered, a little raggedy but proud and brave. Selma embraced everyone who came, important people and forgotten people, black and white, young and old, foot soldiers and presidents and with the same grace, underfunded and disorganized but somehow dignified, humble and with amazing grace.

Franklin Abbott

March 11, 2015

Midway Woods

(Thanks to Franklin Abbott for permission to use and edit this piece.)

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The Existentialist is published monthly. Deadline for the May 2015 newsletter is April 19. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.