

# 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 •

## ***FOUNDERS DAY 2015: Celebrating our 40th Year***

***By Rev. Marsha Mitchiner  
with additions by Charlene Ball***

**We will celebrate Founders Day on September 20, 2015.** This is our 39th annual celebration, which means it will mark the beginning of our 40th year. This year, we will observe our anniversary with special music by Dr. Jean Heinrich and the First E Street Band, along with a message by our Fellowship Minister, Rev. Marsha Mitchiner.

That's an amazing accomplishment for a small, liberal congregation founded on and guided by the principles of existential and feminist thought. Everyone who is now or has been a member/friend should feel proud of our continued existence and what we've accomplished over these 39 years. We have hosted many special events from book signings to social justice fund raisers to birthday/anniversary parties to awesome First E coffeehouses and arts/crafts



*Members of the First E-Street Band: Jean Heinrich,  
Andy Weiskoff, and Ted Pettus*

*Continued on page 4.*

**First Existentialist  
Congregation of  
Atlanta**

470 Candler Park Drive,  
NE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30307  
404-378-5570  
[www.firstexistentialist.org](http://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](mailto:revm@bellsouth.net)  
Office Administrator:  
Edith Covington,  
[office@firstexistentialist.org](mailto: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](mailto: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**

**By D. Patton White, Board Chair**

The Board of Directors met on Monday, August 3, at 7:00 PM in the Sanctuary. The board discussed several items, including the possible disposal of a piano that is currently stored in the office being used by the History Project, shifting the time of the Annual Board retreat slated for August 29 to now run from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and a lengthy report about the tree removal in the woodlands area of our property. Due to the first Monday in September falling on Labor Day, the Board agreed to conduct the September meeting on Monday, September 14, instead. At the August 29 retreat, the board will be holding a visioning session to lay the groundwork for the congregation for the next 3-5 years. ~

## **Community News & Activities**

--**Heads Up: Facilitators' workshop will meet on Sunday, October 4**, after the COL. If you would like to facilitate at the COL or if you already facilitate, come share tips and challenges, learn, and practice. If you like, bring a snack to share.

--**The Book Discussion Group meets on Sunday, September 27**, after the COL. We will discuss Chapter 3 of *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Joy DeGruy. All are welcome.

### **ONGOING:**

--**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. Call Wilj at 404-626-4763 for information.

--**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.

--**Lost-n-Found Thrift and Consignment Store**, 2585 Chantilly Drive, is open M-Sat 10-5; Sundays noon-6. Lost-n-Found, which helps homeless GLBTQI youth, was founded by our former office administrator, Rick Westbrook.

--**Submissions and news for the October Newsletter** are due to Charlene by Sunday, September 20. Send to [mcharleneball@yahoo.com](mailto:mcharleneball@yahoo.com).

--**Contact Robert Stewart** with your news and activities for his weekly e-newsletter: [robertstewart369@gmail.com](mailto:robertstewart369@gmail.com). ~

*Ah! what a divine religion might be found out if charity  
were really made the principle of it instead of faith. ~  
Percy Bysshe Shelley*

---

## ***Guild Reports***

### ***Program Guild*** ***By Charlene Ball***

**The Program Guild held its quarterly meeting on August 18** at 6:00 p.m. at First E to plan the Sunday Celebrations of Life (COLs) for October, November, and December. Highlights of upcoming COLs are Founders Day on September 20, the Day of the Dead on November 1, the Native American Giveaway on November 29, and the Traditional Existential Christmas on December 20.

In the upcoming months we will hear from Rev. Duncan Teague; Rev. Marsha Mitchiner; Dr. Sharon Mathis; Rev. Kim Palmer; Meg Gibbs (daughter of former member Belinda Gibbs); Dr. Franklin Abbott; Dr. Vanessa Jackson; Becky Rafter, Executive Director of WAND (Women's Action for New Directions); Rev. Marti Keller; and First E member Hank Pfadenhauer.

November will be Guild Month, and each of our active guilds will make a brief presentation during the COL. On November 1, the Finance Committee and the Fundraising Guild will present; on November 8, the Education and Communication/Newsletter Guilds will present; on November 15, we will hear from the Building and Grounds Guild and the Art Guild; on November 22, we will hear from the Program and Social Justice Guilds; and on November 29, we will hear from the Membership Guild.

The next meeting of the Program Guild will be on November 3 at 6:00 p.m. All members and friends are welcome to attend. ~

### ***Membership Guild*** ***By Charlene Ball***

**The Membership Guild 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 [cincodemayo55@comcast.net](mailto:cincodemayo55@comcast.net) or Elaine at [ergale@hotmail.com](mailto:ergale@hotmail.com). ~

### ***Social Justice Guild*** ***By Charlene Ball***

**The Social Justice Guild met** on August 2. Lorraine chaired, Linda took the minutes, and Carol provided food. Lorraine and Kartrice will write newsletter articles for October and November. Edi reported that she met with the new principal at Mary Lin School to discuss possibilities for future cooperation between the school and the History Project. She found Dr. Johnson, as well as the new librarian of the Media Center, very interested and positive. The Book Discussion Group will meet next on September 27 to discuss Chapter 3 of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Dr. Joy De Gruy. The SJG's next meeting will be on October 4. Lorraine will chair; Carol will be recorder; and we will go to Bennett's to get food, then meet either in Grant Park or at Libby's (Libby is agreeable). Members and friends are welcome to attend SJG meetings. ~

*White privilege is really permission to be ordinary. ~*  
*Jarek Steele (owner of Left Bank Books, St. Louis, MO)*

# July 2015 Finance Report

<u>2015 Cash Flow</u>	<u>Operating</u>	<u>Designated</u>
Total Income	45,697	2,476
Total Expenses	(42,643)	(2,201)
Net thru July 31	3,054	275

## Fund Types & Names    Account Balances on July 31

<unaudited>

2015 General Operating Account                      3,054

Designated Operating Funds                              26,970

Use Where Needed Fund	1,461
Sanctuary Accessibility	18,384
Leadership Development	750
Community Garden/Labyrinth	(68)
Building & Grounds	261
Woodland Sanctuary	1,343
Minister's Discretionary	1,187
Social Justice	1,470
Attic Insulation Fund	1,250
Children's Program	677
Music Fund	255

Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan Fund (\$8K)    6,816

Total First E Funds                              36,840

Old Stone Church History Project                      1,536

## FUND OF THE MONTH CLUB

*The Fund of the Month is the Garden Fund.  
Please write "Garden Fund" on your check.*

~

## Founders' Day

*Continued from page 1*

shows and last, but not least, Sunday COL speakers that inspire and stimulate. And there's so much more greatness to come.

Join with other First E supporters on Founders Day to remember why you initially came and why you've stayed, to celebrate our combined efforts and accomplishments, to enjoy the fellowship of other congregation members/friends, and to stimulate/dedicate ourselves to what more can be. ~

## WISH LIST

*If you would like to celebrate our 39th Founders Day with a gift, here are some suggestions: donations to our accessibility fund, active participation in a guild or project, items for the kid's program (creative activity projects/items), short candles for the meditation tables, gift certificates to stores like Office Depot, bring a friend to COL to introduce them to our wonderful community. Look around to see what item may be needed or project that needs completing. Let your imagination and love for our community be your guide.*

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

*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>.*

---

# Social Justice Corner

## ***Helping (and Hurting) Public Education in Georgia***

*This letter to the editor, from a fellow activist I've known through the Moral Monday movement here in Georgia, Terry Emeka Thomas, was printed recently in the ajc. He's allowed me to share it with my First E family as one African-American man's take on the attempt by Governor Deal to allow a state takeover of "chronically failing" schools. We voters will have our say on the matter in a statewide referendum vote in November 2016. Lorraine Fontana*

***By Terry Emeka Thomas (with additional information by Lorraine Fontana)***

**Two years after the assassination of my fraternity brother, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,** integration of public schools began in earnest all across America. Black teachers and administrators populated the field of education so much that the powers that be in politics and education felt there were too many. The answer to that problem was the National Teachers Exam, a culturally biased test that consequently purged many great black teachers from the classroom.

That was in the 1970s. Fast-forward to today, where tests and grading schools are being used to invalidate the public school system in Georgia and across America. Privatization is the ultimate aim.

In the 2016 referendum on Opportunity School Districts, Georgians will decide who will control public education. If the governor wins, he takes over personnel and the curriculum. Proposed bills like House Bill 481 introduced by Rep. Rahn Mayo on black history and diversity will not be given an ice cube's chance in hell of being passed. Histories of Native Americans, women, Latino Americans and the Jewish Holocaust may never be properly taught or given a chance to be taught if the public does not wake up and vote "no" to Gov. Deal's Machiavellian machinations to create billions for himself, partners and associates. *Terry Thomas, Atlanta*

***Our whitewashed version of American and world history has aided in the spread of white race supremacy....***

*(Lorraine Fontana) Terry also sent the following to all his Moral Monday sisters and brothers after the massacre of those nine Black people at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston by white supremacist Dylann Roof. It's instructive how Thomas sees these issues connected.*

*(Terry Thomas) What is needed is an education on race, along with a conversation on race. This year I advocated for Georgia House Bill # 481 introduced by State Rep. Rahn Mayo. H.B. #481 is an African-centered worldview of Black History and Diversity. Our whitewashed version of American and world history has aided in the spread of white race supremacy and Black and colored inferiority. House Bill #481 calls for the truthful education about Blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, the Jewish Holocaust, and women, or the pedagogy of the oppressed.*

Calling this young man [Dylan Roof, the shooter of 8 people in Charleston earlier this summer] psychotic, which might be true, only excuses the conservative/racist education and social engineering [that led to his actions]. South Carolina is not isolated; it is connected to a cultural fabric woven with mis-education and xenophobia. In 1992 I created a theoretical framework for the (NEA) National Education Association for Black Studies and Afrocentric curricula infusion. According to *The New York Times*, five states - Florida, Arkansas, Colorado, Michigan, and Illinois - have mandated statewide K-12 Black History curricula infusion in public schools. This movement needs to spread to all the states.

This vicious man [Roof] is 21 years old, yet he manifested the same caliber of race hatred held by conservative/racist rebel soldiers of the Confederacy. Race hatred has deep historical roots and can't be prayed, chanted, or meditated away. It must face education without a Eurocentric version of the world. Race relations in American society will improve when the

*Continued on page 7*

# **Minister's Corner**

*by Rev. Marsha Mitchiner*

## **Loving Thoughts, Healing Wishes, Congratulations and Condolences--**

\*Our sympathy to **Kevin James** in the loss of his **older brother** who raised him after his mother's death. Please keep **Kevin, Robin and his family** in your loving thoughts.

\*Caring thoughts to **Mary Howard** who was joined by friends to remember and celebrate the **one-year anniversary of the passing of her husband, Willie**.

\*Caring thoughts go out to **Linda Bell** in the loss of her **much loved feline companion, Isis**.

\*Congratulations to **Martha Renfroe Garner and Sharon Sanders** who were **married LEGALLY** at their home on August 15 after being in a marriage of love for 20 years.

\*Congratulations to **Lynn Tippetts and Barbara Van Helsdingen** who were **LEGALLY married** at First E on August 22. They will be spending time in Canada celebrating their wedding and Barbara's birthday.

\***Congratulations to Joseph Verdell** on his permanent **job** with the **Juvenile Justice System**. Plus, he will begin his **graduate studies** in January 2016.

\***Congratulations to Will Stewart, son of Robert and Carol**, who graduated from Auburn last year and has been hired for a **job** in his field.

\***Welcome, at least for a brief visit, to Gabriel Nahmias** who will be **in town for a month**. Hopefully he will have time to include First E while he's here. Look for him at COL.

\***Welcome to Nancy White** who is now a **fully entrenched Georgia resident** with driver's license to prove it! She has already gotten her hands dirty at First E helping with the Book and Bake Sale. Welcome and thanks!

\***Welcome home to Nathaniel Jones!** At the last minute, **Edi Kelman, Bill Read, Lorraine Fontana, Andy Weiskoff, Mary Turnpaugh and Rev. Marsha** were able to attend his rescheduled hearing and learn he would be coming home the next day. We are pleased he is back in his apartment and ready for lots of First E help and hugs.

\***Healing wishes to Glen Lopez** who is **home following surgery** and an extended stay at Shepard Spine Center. He's doing better but still limited in the amount of time he can be up and out. Cards, emails, and calls are appreciated. Visits can be scheduled with Glen.

\***Healing wishes to Marti Keller's daughter** who experienced health difficulties in her pregnancy that resulted in an early birth and to her 3.5 pound baby. Marti reports that **daughter and granddaughter are stable and improving**.

## **Many Thanks To:**

\***Libby Ware and Charlene Ball** for planning, coordinating, and working the **Existential Book and Bake Sale** on August 8. This yearly event is always fun and profitable. It takes many volunteers to pull it off but it takes the time, energy and planning that Libby and Charlene put in before the date to create such a success. A \$1,500 success!!!

\***Andy Weiskoff** for his clever, delightful, eye-catching **flier for the Book and Bake Sale**.

\***Bill Laney** for his work behind the scenes that culminated in the **installation of our beautiful new front doors**. And by the time you read this, a special device should be added that will allow those in wheelchairs to open the door automatically. More work is planned to make the entry area more accessible. Great job, Bill! ~

# Founders Day ~ Beginning our 40th Year

*On September 20, First E will hold our annual celebration of Founders Day, when we honor our founders and first members. Below are photos of some of First E's Founders.*



*Clockwise, from top right: Bill Read, Betsy Henderson, Dr. Sharon Mathis, and Dr. Jean Heinrich*



## **Public Education in Georgia ~ Continued**

history of America and world civilization is examined and taught properly under the leadership and nurturing of competent classroom teachers.

The Association for the Study of African Life and History (ASALH) turns 100 years old this year. It was started by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History, also the author of *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, and will convene its annual convention in Atlanta at the Sheraton from September 21st through the 27th. Education is the key to understanding, and a moral imperative needed for improved race relations. ~

*Terry Thomas is a native Georgian from Wilcox County from the town of Pitts, Georgia. He earned a B.A. in Art Education from Morris Brown College, 1981, a Masters from Clark Atlanta University in African American Studies, and is currently enrolled as a Doctor of Arts in Humanities student at Clark Atlanta University. Thomas is also a retired classroom teacher – he taught Journalism, Fine Art, and Mass Media for twenty years in Palm Beach County, Florida. Thomas founded the (AACAO) African American Cultural Arts Organization a grassroots 501 (c) (3) entity in 1989 and is the author of the (NEA) National Education Association policy infusing Black Studies and Afrocentric curricula. As president of state Black Caucus for (NEA) in Florida he advocated for the mandate to teach Black History in all Florida public schools from k through 12. The law passed in the early 1990s. He feels his greatest achievement has been helping young people find their talents and nurturing them to become productive contributing members of society, and he's also proud of becoming an activist for his life's work.*

*See you at First E, Lorraine :-)*

# Speakers in September

## **Dr. Sharon Mathis on Honoring Labor on September 6**

**Dr. Sharon Mathis will speak on September 6 on "Honoring Labor: Our Community, Ourselves."** She 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. ~

## **Dr. Mark White on Existentialism and Creativity on September 13**

**Dr. Mark White will speak on "Existentialism and Creativity: Keeping Us in the Moment," on September 13. Mark works as an ethicist** for the Federal Government. He organized a conference of the major African countries to give them a venue to work out public health ethics based on their own cultural values. In previous incarnations he directed CDC's epidemiology training programs abroad and grew that activity from five countries to serving over half the population of the world. He lived in Uganda and the Philippines for seven years, was the United States's only bubonic plague epidemiologist, injected live mosquitoes with viruses, created and directed the infectious diseases department at Booth Memorial Medical Center, a 600-bed hospital owned by the Salvation Army in Queens, New York. He is wildly, madly, deeply in love with Shelly Ahmann and their two daughters, Leila and ZuZu. He is currently working on his first novel. ~

## **Rev. Marsha Mitchiner Speaking on Founders' Day, September 20**

**Growing up in middle Georgia, Marsha and her family were active members of their 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. ~

## **Meg Gibbs on Authenticity on September 27**

**Meg Gibbs will speak on "Authenticity: Showing Up Where You Are" on September 27.** Born and raised in Atlanta, Meg is the daughter of Red Earth/Belinda Gibbs and the goddaughter of Pauline Clance, Nancy Zumoff, and Rev. Lanier Clance. Her bio begins this way, because this is where she comes from: these people, this community, this village that raised her. She has sung and danced on this stage, along with many memories of growing up playing in the congregation. Now she is in the midst of transition and transformation (aren't we all?) finding her way as an adult and coming into her own. She is a Spiritual Transformation Coach, Embodied Leader and Experiential Trainer. She works one-on-one, with groups, and leads workshops to create transformation through movement (blending a background in modern dance, shamanic spirituality, and coaching) to get people into their bodies and connected to their personal wisdom. She believes whole-heartedly in finding Spirit and healing through any means necessary—dancing, being in nature, writing, breathing, anything that makes you come alive. She is excited to share her story and connect with where we are now, in this moment, authentically. ~

*Existentialism is the subjective experience, not some preset essence that determines what a human becomes. - Rev. Marsha Mitchiner*



# **September 2015 Sunday Celebrations of Life**

***September 6 Honoring Labor: Our Community, Ourselves***

***Speaker: Dr. Sharon Mathis***

***Facilitator: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut***

***Accompanist and Special Music: Craig Rafuse***

***September 13 Existentialism and Creativity: Keeping Us in the Moment***

***Speaker: Dr. Mark White***

***Facilitator: Bill Laney***

***Accompanist: Alan Dynin***

***September 20 Founders' Day Celebration***

***Speaker: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner***

***Facilitator: D. Patton White***

***Accompanist: The First E-Street Band with Andy Weiskoff, Craig Rafuse, Dr. Jean Heinrich, Ted Pettus, and Others***

***September 27 Authenticity: Showing Up Where You Are***

***Speaker: Meg Gibbs***

***Facilitator: Dr. Charlene Ball***

***Accompanist: William "Bill" Chelton***

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

# The Back Page

## Members and Friends Speak Out

### An Interesting Conversation

By Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

A while ago I was having coffee with a friend who told me about a Sunday s/he had been asked to speak at a UU congregation. When s/he arrived 15 minutes before the service, there were only four people there--the piano player and three others. One of the three greeted her and asked if s/he would like some coffee or water. By service time a few more had arrived, and 20 minutes later there were maybe 22-25 people. After service two people came up to say thank you for speaking. The congregation was First E.



I have wondered before about how a guest speaker feels when there are so few people there at the beginning of the service and during the speaker's message. This speaker had heard about us as a warm and active congregation. S/he asked if we were having problems. I didn't know exactly how to answer that. Our Program Guild works hard to find speakers they believe we want to hear. So why do we come late and only a small number come at all? We traditionally have been late arrivers, which reflects a statement I've made many times: we would rather that you come late than not at all. I say that primarily so newcomers will feel they can come on even if they are running late. I know, too, there can be many reasons for arriving late: some do not want to sit through the personal announcements: some have problems getting the kid(s) fed, dressed; etc.

***If you rarely come, ask yourself "why?" and let the Program Guild, Board of Directors, or me know what you are looking for that we are not providing.***

I'm asking that you think about why you come late or not at all. If being late has simply become a habit, maybe you could consider the feelings of the speaker (facilitator and pianist, too) and decide to create a new habit of being on time. If you rarely come, ask yourself "why?" and let the Program Guild, Board of Directors, or me know what you are looking for that we are not providing. This is not about making you feel guilty. This is about wanting each of us to be a part of an active, curious and considerate community. Please feel free to contact the guild or board members or call/email me with suggestions (or to let me know how you feel about my writing this article). *Marsha ~*

*The only time we have is now.*

**The Existentialist** is published monthly. Deadline for the October 2015 newsletter is September 20. Send your articles and announcements to [mcharleneball@yahoo.com](mailto:mcharleneball@yahoo.com). The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.