

The EXISTENTIALIST

Newsletter of the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta
*An Independent Fellowship Affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association
 Gathered in 1976*

I am an atheist.

By John Trestrail I am an atheist. By that I mean that I choose to live my life without the assumption that God exists. I don't know if there is a god and I don't know that there isn't one. It just doesn't seem to be something that I'll ever know for sure.

While I am an analytical kind of guy, I don't accept Pascal's Wager. This philosophical argument basically breaks down into a grid:

	God exist	God doesn't exist
I believe in God	Go to Heaven	Have a slightly less enjoyable life
I don't believe in God	Go to Hell	Have a slightly more enjoyable life

Regardless of the probability you assign of God's existence, the expected utility of believing in God eclipses that of not believing in God. This has always felt like false logic to me; an unfair game skewed against the player; fear-based motivation.

I've read a number of philosophers that have not only rejected the concept of God but also outright attacked it. Specifically Friedrich Nietzsche in AntiChrist and the Marquis de Sade in X vociferously attacked religion and Christianity and painted it as a weakening and enslaving concept.

There has been a fair bit of buzz lately about a series of billboards posted around Atlanta by Freedom from Religion Foundation. They are sure to be inflammatory in the South and probably throughout the country. One of the billboards is a stained glass picture saying "Imagine No Religion"; straight out of one of our favorite First E songs: Imagine by John Lennon.

I am not sure what to make of it myself. On one hand I am very cynical about religion (especially Christianity) and still fondly recall my teenaged rebellion away from the Catholic Church in the midst of all of my philosophical readings; on the other, my beliefs, assumptions, and morality are a personal choice and I don't know if I agree with the idea of "proselytizing" atheism. After all, I don't know that I am right; I just don't share the same basic assumption about God with a majority of my countrymen.

Janna's recent words on Creative Safe Space While Exploring the Edge have motivated me to think more about this issue and reach out to my brothers and sisters at First E for discussion. I'd welcome a chance to talk with any of you that share similar or dissimilar ideas about this. We may not agree but I'd like to learn from other perspectives in weighing the pros and cons atheist activism. Feel free to grab me after service or shoot me an email: johnnyfoos@gmail.com.

Healing Wishes & Loving Thoughts



happy that the Williams have found a home and Antioch has found a wonderful pastoral family.

Nathaniel Jones in the loss of his sister.

Edith Covington in the loss of her canine companion.

JERUSALEM HOUSE

Many thanks to all who donated back to school items for Jerusalem House, a residential program for homeless/low income individuals and families in which someone has HIV/AIDS. Statistics of December 31, 2008 show that the greater metro Atlanta service area counted a total of 24,679 people living with HIV/AIDS of which 17,769 were low income. These figures are expected to grow at an annual rate of 4%. Research indicates that 78% or 13,860 low income people living with HIV/AIDS in the Atlanta service area are currently in need of housing. A total of only 224 units of permanent supportive housing exist in this area and Jerusalem House provides 138 of these(62%). Approximately 40% of Jerusalem House's four programs are children. Nearly 90% of every donated dollar goes directly to program costs. If you would like to donate money to this program, send check to 17 Executive Park Dr NE, Suite 290, Atlanta 30329-2220. You can find their web site at www.jerusalemhouse.org or call them at 404-350-0259.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Happy 4th anniversary to Rev. Dr. John and Tinnette Williams along with the church family of Antioch East Baptist Church. We at First E are

LOVE, KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

By request I am providing 2 quotes I used in the service on August 29. Both are by The Dalai Lama. "Compassion is not religious business, it is human business; it is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability; it is essential for human survival." "For those who may not find happiness to exercise religious faith, it's ok to remain a radical atheist, it's absolutely an individual right, but the important thing is with a compassionate heart--then no problem."

☆ Outside the Lines



ARTISTS' CARDS
HANDMADE PAPER
JEWELRY
PHOTOGRAPHY
PAINTINGS
ORNAMENTS
AND MORE

2010 FESTIVAL OF HANDCRAFTED ART



Friday December 3rd, 7 pm to 10 pm *Opening Party*
Saturday, December 4th, 10 am to 4 pm



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS HAVE A "COMMON READ"

We Unitarian Universalists are undertaking a new project – a Common Read. A Common Read invites participants to read and discuss the same book in a given period of time. Congregations, groups and individuals are invited to join in!

Many communities – schools, towns, and even states – are using this kind of project to build community and understanding. Conversations and discussion groups enhance each person's encounter with a book and give diverse people a shared experience around which to build deeper understanding and action. Our Unitarian Universalist community is doing this in 2010-11.

The book we have chosen invites us to a clearer awareness of contemporary immigration issues and is published by our own Beacon Press. It is Margaret Regan's *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* (Beacon Press, 2010). The book is available at libraries and booksellers everywhere and at the UUA Bookstore. More details, a study guide and a flyer can be found here: www.uua.org/publications/commonread

The Death of Josseline presents a series of on-the-ground stories of those most intimately involved in the dynamics – immigrants, activists, human rights workers, and border patrol people. Told in story form, it lets readers grasp the human as well as the policy issues at stake. It engages us in the ethical, moral, and spiritual elements of the complex immigration issues.

Start a conversation about this at your congregation! A Common Read can build community by giving us a shared experience, a shared language, and a basis for deep and meaningful conversations.

Mid-South District - UUA On the web at www.msduua.org

Finance Report



THE ROOF is PAID in FULL!!!!
Congratulations to the entire congregation and everyone who helped to raise or donated funds.

Cash Flow	July	August	Sept	October
Operating Income	\$3,595	\$6,260	\$6,300	\$ 4,976
Operating Expenses	\$4,970	\$4,361	45,982	\$5,807
Cash Flow	-\$1,375	\$1,899	\$ 318	-\$ 831

Account Balances as of October 31

\$ 3,232	General Operating Account -- 2010
\$ 2,630	Pre-Paid Operating Pledges – 2011
\$ 9,790	Gay Dellinger Estate Gift
\$ 8,000	Savings -- Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan
\$ 500	Handicap Access Ramp Fund
\$ 1,044	Lanier Clance Lighting Fund
\$ 440	Leadership Development Fund
\$ 700	Building and Grounds Fund
\$ 1,419	Woodland Sanctuary Fund
\$ 527	Minister's Discretionary Fund
\$ 68	First E History Fund
\$ 648	Labyrinth & Garden Fund
\$ 732	Social Justice Fund
\$ 0	Raising The Roof Fund (
\$ 8,228	<u>Old Stone Church History Project</u>
\$ 50	Bi-Racial History Grant (2009)
\$ 3,667	Legacy Markers Grant (2009)
\$ 4,511	Bi-Racial History Grant (2010)

APOLOGIES from Victoria
I am sorry I did not publish a newsletter for September, October or November.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Discussing Our Diversity Workshop

We have always been a diverse congregation of strong individuals and we come from many different spiritual traditions: Atheist, Agnostic, Buddhist, Christian, Existentialist, Jewish, Islamic, Pagan and many others.

On Saturday December 11th, we will present a free workshop for First Existentialist Members and pledging Friends to bring us closer together as a spiritual family. This workshop will be grounded in the principles of our own Existentialist Commitment Statement, and it will be led by Connie Goodbread, the UUA Mid South district program consultant.

This will be an open discussion entertaining all issues. According to Connie, examples of questions that could possibly be addressed are:

- How can we live up to our promises?
 - How can we make a difference?
- How can we be in genuine relationship as we struggle toward our own human wholeness?

The workshop will be focused on moving towards positive solutions rather than dwelling on negative conditions and offers us an opportunity to grow and move forward as a congregation.

All Members and Friends are invited to participate in this community-building workshop. The workshop will be from 10am until 3:30pm on Saturday December 11th at the Little Five Points Community Center. Childcare will be provided.

Connie Goodbread is the Education Director for Mid-South District and Interim District Executive

for the St. Lawrence District. She is a Credentialed Director of Religious Education with over twenty years of experience in that calling.

Connie has studied Systems Thinking with Rabbi Dr. Edwin H. Friedman. She has also studied Healthy Congregation development and congregational conflict identification and transformation with Rev. Dr. Peter Steinke. Prior to her district work, Connie was a Healthy Congregations and Conflict consultant. Connie is a trainer of Dr. Steinke's *Healthy Congregations* process and has written a Unitarian Universalist supplement to Dr. Steinke's work that is called *The Smart Church*.

Connie has also co-authored, with Rev. Susan Smith, an emerging congregation process called *The Chrysalis Way*. Connie is part of a team that redesigned and led *Dwight Brown Leadership Experience* and *Southland Unitarian Universalist Leadership Experience*.

"It's Socialism!" By Ab Roesel

"It's Socialism!," is so often the right's response to and criticism of new government policies or programs, it seems to be a cry constantly ringing in our ears. We are apparently supposed to think the verdict's in. The discussion's over. Socialism is bad, and a government program so labeled has to be opposed. And, a government espousing programs judged socialist must be opposed.

We're supposed to think that America is all about free markets and that free markets make everything better by fostering the formation of wealth through individual effort and initiative. So, that's what we generally espouse, free market economics. Most of the time free markets seem to work pretty

well. However, you may have noticed times when free markets seemed to experience catastrophic meltdowns such as 1929 or 2007-8. Millions of able-bodied hard working people lost their jobs world wide. Companies and banks were collapsing, and people were losing their homes.

But, in the 30's Franklin Roosevelt was elected. Under his administration the government began putting money into circulation through federal work programs. It stopped bank closures and began building aspects of the social safety net that protect us today, such as the Social Security system, and it passed laws to regulate banks and other financial institutions to prevent them from involving our economy in regular economic crashes.

Then, as now, right wing politicians opposed the efforts of Democrats to fuel the economic recovery. To this day they point at World War II as the engine that lifted us out of the "Great Depression," not the intervention of the Roosevelt administration in the economy. A disinterested observer, however, might assert that the war spending was governmental intervention in the economy on steroids and strengthens the argument that government intervention in the market is a rational alternative to allowing its collapse and the human suffering that collapse entails.

Today we are recovering from another collapse. Today a Democratic administration is struggling to institute policies to fuel the recovery, and today, as in the 30's, the "Party of No" is opposing the administration at every turn with the cries of "Socialism!" and "Deficit Spending!."

But, we have to remember that, according to the Constitution, the government is instituted by us to serve us. Through our government we undertake to do as a united citizenry those things that we cannot accomplish as individuals. We build roads, firehouses, police stations, schools, water systems and armies. We impose taxes and pay them to support our undertakings. We generally accept the rightness of these efforts.

Today, as in the 30's, the privately driven economy is coming out of an economic collapse because of our efforts through our government to get the economy going in spite of the opposition of "the party of No." People can call it "socialism," if they like; it's working. And, it beats doing nothing, or putting more money in the pockets of the wealthy in the vain hope that somewhere along the way some will "trickle down" to the rest of us.

Right-wing policies in business and finance drove the world into economic collapse. Those policies in political opposition to the Obama administration are prolonging the misery. It would be madness to return the reins of power to their hands regardless of the fear engendering name they attach to the policies of the Democrats. The fact that we have an administration willing to work for us is all that gives us hope.

THIRD FRIDAY FILM SERIES



Alan Ball's **Towelhead** (2008)
a meditation on race, adolescent sexual awakening and alienation

Nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for Best Female Lead

Friday, December 17th @ 7:30 pm
Doors open 7:00 pm
Popcorn and refreshments available
Donations - \$1 to \$10 sliding scale.
All are welcome. Stay to discuss the film.



Karla and Diamond Lil , performing to a full house, at the November 6th fundraiser at first E. Diamond Lil is an Atlanta legend who has been performing drag shows since the late 60's (see creative loafing article http://clatl.com/2003-10-09/cover_feature.html)



Member Debra Jacob has created a new blog,

www.urbandrawingboard.com

Her photography captures graffiti, public marches and other free expression on the streets of Atlanta and San Francisco, where she has lived. She invites the congregation to view her work and become blog "followers."

U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey

The Pew Forum released the results of a 32 question survey that they administered to a portion of the American public last spring. Surprising to some, atheist/agnostics performed the best of any “religious” self-designated affiliation in survey respondents answering 20.9 out of 32 questions correctly on average.

The survey question’s spread the gamut from Christian doctrine and historical figures to “world” religions (like Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism) to the US Constitution as it relates to religion in America.

Atheist/Agnostics, Jews, and Mormons Score Best on Religious Knowledge Survey

Average # of questions answered correctly out of 32

Atheist/Agnostic	20.9
Jewish	20.5
Mormon	20.3
White evangelical Protestant	17.6
White Catholic	16.0
White mainline Protestant	15.8
Nothing in particular	15.2
Black Protestant	13.4
Hispanic Catholic	11.6

Sample size: 3,412 Americans, age 18 and up, in English and Spanish May 19 – June 6, 2010. Full details of the survey can be found at <http://pewforum.org>.

Editorial by John Trestrail

While the study report does not theorize as to the reason for the higher than expected atheist/agnostic results, I’ll give it a go.

First off, 2.3% of the world’s population is self-described as atheist while another 11.9% describe themselves as non-religious. While the approximately 65% of the Japanese are atheist, only 10-16% of Americans fall into this group. This small minority of our population is often correlated with higher levels of education. However, the Pew Forum survey considered this variable and found the atheist/agnostics outperformed other groups even when statistically corrected for level of education.

Perhaps, the decision of atheism isn’t one taken lightly by most non-believers. The prospect of an afterlife of eternal damnation may be sufficient for the prospective atheist to do a little research and reading on the various major world religious options first. This may be enough to gain the basic knowledge necessary to outperform others that have perhaps found little reason to explore outside of their inherited religious association on the survey.

Board of Directors

Elaine Gale ergale@hotmail.com
 Jonathon Nye jnye@emory.edu
 Bill Laney bill3391a@yahoo.com
 Glen Lopez 30307@comcast.net
 Shelby Smith, sas_25@hotmail.com
 Dominic Thomas dominic.m.thomas@gmail.com
 Edith Covington
 Karla Crawford
 Hank Pfadenhauer

Staff

Marsha Mitchiner, Fellowship Minister 404.355.8894
 Rick Westbrook, Office Admin 404.378.5570
 R. Lanier Clance, Founder & Min. Emeritus

Newsletter Editor

Victoria Trestrail victoria@tmkatlanta.com

**DECEMBER
CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

Outside the Lines



ARTISTS' CARDS
HANDMADE PAPER
JEWELRY
PHOTOGRAPHY
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ORNAMENTS
AND MORE



**2010
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First Existential Congregation of Atlanta
470 Candler Park Dr. NE
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 378-5570
www.firstexistentialist.org

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The **EXISTENTIALIST**