

Celebrating 35 Years

FIRST E FOUNDERS' DAY

SUNDAY

SEPTEMBER 25th

2011



Presenting our own 1st E Songbook
Rev. R. Lanier Clance & Carol Harter, 1990



Building Our Ramp 1986



**First Woodland Sanctuary
Clean-up, 2004**

Work Crew: Carol Calvert,
Bill Read, Carol Sandiford,
Betsy Henderson, Ashlea Davis,
Linda Scharko, Justin Read,
Pat Hewatt, Steve Davis,
(Edith Covington, not shown).

Our History

During the summer of 1976, we began as a few individuals gathering monthly with Rev. R. Lanier Clance in a private home in Decatur, and started holding weekly services there on Friday evenings that September. In October, 1976, our small congregation, with Lanier's leadership and guidance, voted to establish the First Existentialist Church, our purpose being to create and maintain an existential community based on existential philosophy and psychology. "At that time, 12 persons seemed like a large attendance and 20 persons was a crowd."¹

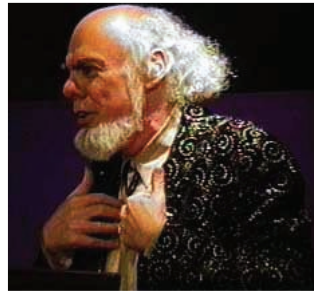
In January, 1978, the congregation approved submitting an application to affiliate with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA); we were accepted into the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations that April. The following summer, we began searching for a larger meeting space, relocating that fall to the Decatur/DeKalb YMCA. In November, 1978, we changed our Celebration of Life services to Sunday mornings and began growing in membership and offering more services as we grew.

Starting in January, 1980, we started discussions with the members of Phoenix Unitarian Fellowship about the purchase of their building at 470 Candler Park Drive. We reached agreement, and moved into our current location that April. We held our first Celebration of Life - in our own building - the first Sunday in May, 1980.

We celebrated our first Founders' Day on September 14, 1980 as we dedicated our building at 470 Candler Park Drive. Originally known as the First Existentialist Church, we changed our name in the 1980s to Congregation to reflect our commitment to inclusiveness. We have continued to celebrate Founders' Day each September to remember how a small group of "idealists who really wanted to apply what we believed about the world"² proved that an existential community could exist, survive and thrive. This September 25, 2011, we gather again, in celebration of our 35th anniversary.

Our Founder

Rev. R. Lanier Clance was born and raised in Florida in a working class, union-oriented community. He grew up as a Baptist and graduated from the Lexington Theological Seminary. He served as a Unitarian Universalist minister for eight years from 1965 to 1973 in Cleveland, Ohio.



Rev. R. Lanier Clance

After moving to Atlanta, Lanier began the journey to create a philosophically-based existential congregation "because many of us wanted to be spirited or spiritual and deal with life, issues of meaning and values without limitations, or having to pay attention to theology and traditional thoughts of religion." Lanier served the First Existentialist Congregation as Minister from 1976 to 2001 – standing in the pulpit and striding across the stage - wearing colorful clothes, one earring and often a straw hat or beret - while speaking in basic terms, telling stories about freedom, individualism and the subjective experience.

When Lanier retired as Minister in 2001, First E. bestowed upon him the title of Minister Emeritus. He has lived and exemplified his beliefs and was arrested more than once at various civil disobedience demonstrations. His passion for the principles of existentialism, feminism, and social justice have guided his professional and personal life and have been an example to others of a life well lived. Lanier's unique, charismatic essence has been the cornerstone of First E's beginning and has laid the foundation of our continuing identity.

¹ from a 1980 First Existentialist history statement.

² Rev. R. Lanier Clance (1998).



Bill Fleming



Pauline Clance &
Gay Dellinger



Kitty Wimbish,
Shirley Wren, &
Darlene Weathers
(Lightning Rattle)



Rev. R. Lanier Clance & Rev. Marsha Mitchiner, 2005



Rev. R. Lanier Clance & Pat Hewatt, 2005

Day of the Dead, 1996

Jill Ruhlman, Pauline Clance,
Lisa Cottrell, Jo Hamby



**Anti-Iraq War Protest,
2002**

Nancy Zumoff,
Rev. R. Lanier Clance,
Rev. Janna Nelson,
Ashlea Davis,
Carol Sandiford,
Liz Albright



Pride 1995

Belinda Gibbs, Meghan Gibbs,
Liz Albright, Rev. R. Lanier Clance

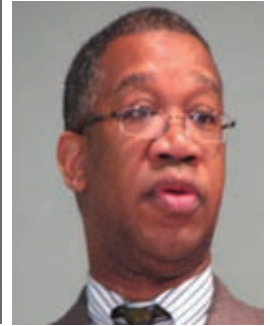


First E Sanctuary Painting Team

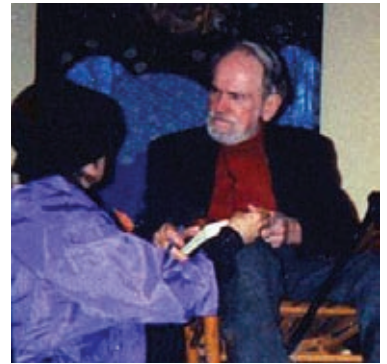
Jo Hamby, Julie Fabb, Mel Liddel, Wilj Sturkey Mercado, Betsy Henderson, Mia Jamison, Ivan, Shane Wood



Duncan Teague



James T. Bugenthal
Jean Heinrich



Peace March, 2002

Ashlea Davis,
Carol Sandiford,
Jo Hamby



Sharing Our Space/Walking Our Talk

Activism and the importance of community have always been a major part of our belief system. Some of our history that affirms these core principles are:

Providing a home to:

Open Circle, an experiential relational discussion group; Circle of Healing - our response to the AIDS crisis, making a nurturing home for people with AIDS and AIDS service workers; Road Busters - a neighborhood preservation group; Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Association (ALFA); Atlanta Feminist Womens' Chorus (AFWC); Black and White Men Together; Zami - African-American lesbian writers; Existential Theater/Open Invitation Theater - productions involving health, social and political issues; Kay Rosenbloom - children's theater; Jane Doe Collective; Funny That Way - a socio-political improv group; Bi-nature/Bi-friendly - a support group; Chatahoochee Country Dancers; Milongo Tango; Latino Lesbian & Gay Assoc; National Organization of Women (NOW) - Georgia Chapter temporary offices.

Co-sponsoring events and benefits:

Men Stopping Violence; Charis Circle; ACLU; Rainbow Poetry Collective; Speakfire - a gay & lesbian poetry group; ZAMI-Audre Lourde Scholarship Fund; Leonard Peltier Native American Charities support group;

Providing space and support for various visual, music and movement events:

Existential Art Gallery - exhibitions by local and regional artists; Outside The Lines - our own annual arts and crafts show and sale featuring local and regional talent; Art In Odd Places - a site exhibition during the 1996 Olympics; Vagina Monologues; Corozones Valientes, Costa Rican Women's Art Collective - show and sale of handcrafts by Guatemalan women refugees living in Mexico; Ruth Allison; Africa Sogay Guinea West African Drum and Dance Group; Swing and Contra Dances, live bands and dance lessons; concerts by AFWC, Cowboy Envy,

Emerald Rose; Angela (Bucky) Motter; Scott Hooker and Janna Nelson with Standard Deviation; Adodi Muse; Joyce and Jackie; LaTonya Peoples; Atrium Jazz Trio; Diamond Lil; Creative Music Assoc, national/international jazz; Euphonics Productions - international folk music; Elise Witt; First E Coffee House featuring local, regional and national acoustic musicians; Beacon Dance; Steve and Ronnog Seaburg; Edi/th Kelman - Fiber and Light.

Speakers who have enlightened, encouraged and entertained:

Gloria Steinem, bell hooks; former Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell, Rep. John Lewis, Jane Fonda, James F.T. Bugental, Ph.D. (Considered the father of Existential Psychotherapy); Dr. Shirlene Holmes (GSU); Dr. Pauline Rose Clance.

Activism as a way of being:

Annual Celebration Of Life services to honor Susan B. Anthony, Women's History Month, Black History Month; participating in marches and demonstrations for LGBT Pride, Dr. Martin Luther King Day events and marches, Anti-War, Immigration Reform; joining UUCA in a six week racism seminar; Third Friday Film Series on important social issues; recognized by Southern Voice publication, UUA and Unity Church Atlanta as a "Welcoming congregation", open to LGBT and other often-marginalized groups.

Loving space: we provide a loving space for weddings, commitment ceremonies, memorial services, parties for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and any other reason to celebrate.

This is just a glimpse into who we are. Through the years, we have been a beacon, a sanctuary, a refuge, an anchor, a friend.



Existential labyrinth/symbol was created in 1978 by Retha Williams, founding member

“The border design is composed of Celtic knot-work, an ancient decorative motif related in its complexity to the labyrinth ... The twining, interlaced enclosure is symbolic of religion in Latin sense of binding together, for us, binding together in the sense of interconnected-ness of spiritual values with our experiences in community life, personal relationships, and introspection.”