

# The Existentialist

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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 •

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## ***Building Community in the New Year***

**VALIDATION** *SANCTUARY* **FREEDOM** **AUTHENTICITY** *ACCEPTANCE*  
**OUTREACH** **RESPONSIBILITY** **CONNECTEDNESS** **POETIC**  
**GRACE** **FORGIVENESS** **COMPASSION** **STRENGTH** *GRATITUDE* *Awaken-*  
*ing* *KINDNESS* **COURAGE** **JOY** **BEING** **LOVE** **OUTRIGHT JOY**

The above are some words First E members chose to represent our core values at a Diversity Workshop held awhile ago led by Connie Goodbread of UUA. We reminded ourselves of these words on January 6 when the Membership Guild led a Celebration of Life (Sunday service) focused on. At the COL, Bill Laney of the Membership and Program Guilds led a discussion during which we re-visited our core values. Bill gave us a handout with these words, and we shouted out still more.

We're good at words. Now the question is how do we live them, and in so doing, build community among our current members, forge connections with surrounding communities, and, we hope, increase our membership?

Marsha Mitchiner, our Fellowship Minister, will continue the discussion on February 10 at our Susan B. Anthony Service. She will speak about our Existential Commitment, drawing parallels to Susan B. Anthony and the women's suffragist movement. After the service, she will facilitate a roundtable discussion that will focus on how we can live our Commitment and our core values. We invite all members and friends to attend and give your input to this discussion. ~

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*As individuals, we value:  
Freedom and justice for everyone  
Commitment to the well-being of all human beings  
Accepting responsibility for our choices and actions  
Diversity and fellowship  
intellectual curiosity and challenges  
- from First Existentialist Congregation Commitment  
Statement*

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**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,  
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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 Libby Ware, Board Chair*

**The First E Board** met on Monday, December 3, at 7:00 pm. Ted Pettus presented Randy Pimsler's update on our application status for a Special Use Permit which would permit an after-school program to use the downstairs area. Randy took bids from several survey companies and has contracted with one of them to survey the property. This is the first step in putting together an application.

Our retreat at The Mountain will be the weekend of May 3-5, 2013. Libby Ware has been asking members to indicate whether they are interested in attending so we can determine how much space to ask for. If you have not filled out a form indicating your interest, please do so. The forms are available in the sanctuary during Celebrations of Life and by attachment of Robert's e-mails.

The Board will sponsor a reception after the service on February 17 in recognition of Linda and Tony Scharko and their continuing support of our congregation, including removing a fallen tree at a reduced fee and fixing our fence for free.

A new nominating committee has been formed with Charlene Ball and Jon Nye volunteering to serve. Since three people are required, Charlene, Jon, and Edith are each going to ask other members to join the nominating committee. [Since this meeting, Ashlea Davis has agreed to be on the Nominating Committee.] This committee's duty is to find candidates for the Board for the coming year. Elections will be held in April.

We are developing a Security Policy to address threats to the sanctuary and the children's program downstairs. Ted suggested we contact the local police precinct to advise them of our concerns and to ask for guidance. Rick will purchase an air horn for the children's educators to use in case of emergency. We have also discussed having one or two people by the back door of the sanctuary at all times to watch out for intruders and locking the door to the stairs after the children have gone down.

From now until the end of March, First E is offering free garden plots to the community. After March 31, the plots will be rented. A notice has been posted to the Candler Park Neighborhood Association's website. Andy Weiskoff offered to install a sprinkler system on a work day in the spring or summer.

Ted has been in contact with representatives from the Sweetwater 420 Fest that takes place in April. They have proposed closing off Candler Park Drive for that weekend. It is up to the Candler Park Neighborhood Organization to advise them if this is acceptable. If the street is closed off, we will be allowed access for the Celebration of Life and they have promised to not do sound checks during our service. They also suggested moving the music stage. The promoter has offered space for God's Chosen Ones since their service is at 3:00 when the noise is more of a concern than at 11:00.

Our next meeting will be Monday, January 7, at 7:00 pm. ~

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## ***Guild Reports***

### ***Membership Guild***

*by Wilj Sturkey-Mercado*

**The Membership Guild** met on Dec. 16. We sold newly-printed gold and teal t-shirts after the service on Dec. 16. Out of 24 printed, 21 were sold. We made a profit of \$82 and that money was turned over to Edith, the First E treasurer. If there is interest, we can order more shirts.

On Dec. 23, we were pleased to have the African American Non-Believers join us at First E, and one member from that group was the main speaker for the service. We had a potluck that day and had a good turnout.

The Sunday greeter from the Membership Guild will send a card to each new visitor who left an address in the Visitor Book. Visitors will get an email if they leave their email address, or a notecard if they leave their home address. Elaine will get some new notecards printed. Additionally, the greeter will inform Marsha, in case she was not in attendance, of any major life events announced at the service.

On Jan. 6, Bill Laney from the Membership Guild will facilitate a discussion about First E at the service. His main focus will be on the changes that we can make at First E to attract new members. Bill wants the comments to stay positive.

By January's end, Carol S. will get a list from the Treasurer of this year's pledges and last year's pledges so that we can compare them and contact people who did not renew.

On Feb. 10 the Membership Guild will sponsor a kiddush. Marsha will facilitate a round-table discussion about First E beforehand.

Elaine will organize the New Member Orientation for the end of January.

Our next Membership Guild meeting will be Jan. 13 at 10:00 am. We have begun offering enticements to the first 10 attendees. ~

## ***Program Guild***

### *by Charlene Ball*

**The Program Guild** has planned some exciting COLs for the new year. For January, in addition to regular speakers like Rev. Janna Nelson (on January 20) and Rev. Kate Hauk (on January 27), we will hear Rev. Lucas Johnson from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who will speak on January 13. On January 6, the Membership Guild will present a special program called "Building Community," facilitated by Rev. Marsha Mitchiner and featuring Bill Laney and members of the Membership Guild. (See cover story for more details.)

The Program Guild consists of Patton White (chair), Charlene Ball, Linda Bell, and Bill Laney. If you would like to be a facilitator for a Sunday COL, contact one of us: Patton: [patton@beacondance.org](mailto:patton@beacondance.org); Charlene: [mcharleneball@yahoo.com](mailto:mcharleneball@yahoo.com); Linda: [lbell@gsu.edu](mailto:lbell@gsu.edu); and Bill: [bill3391a@yahoo.com](mailto:bill3391a@yahoo.com). ~

*For a woman to achieve all that is demanded of her she must regard herself as greater than she is. ~ adapted from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

# Finance Report: December 2012

## General Operating Account Thru Dec. 31

Total Income	64,430
Total Expenses	(62,405)
<b>2012 Cash Flow</b>	<b>2,025</b>

## Fund Types & Names Account Balances on Dec. 31

< unaudited >

**General Operating Account** 2,760

**Designated Operating Funds** 8,532

Gay Dellinger Estate Gift	1,671
Handicap Access Ramp	1,345
Lanier Clance Lighting	1,044
Leadership Development	295
Community Garden	(443)
Building & Grounds	259
Woodland Sanctuary	682
Minister's Discretionary	382
Original 1st E History	68
Labyrinth & Garden	256
Social Justice	914
Attic Insulation Fund	1,250
Music Fund	150
Children's Program	122

**Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan Fund** 5,063

**Special Use Permit Loan Fund (\$4.5K)** 3,900

**Total First E Funds** 20,255

## Old Stone Church History Project

Bi-Racial History Account	2,283
Legacy Markers Account	732

**Total History Project Funds** 3,015

*Third Friday Film Series*  
*Slavery by Another Name*  
*Friday, January 18 at 7:30pm*  
*Sliding Scale Donations Requested \$1-\$10.00*  
*No one turned away*  
*Popcorn & Refreshments*  
*Discussion after the film*  
*(See story on page 7)*

**Wednesday Night Suppers**  
**each Week**  
**6:30 to 8:00/8:30 pm**  
**in the Sanctuary**  
*If you would like to provide a meal*  
*or bring a covered dish,*  
*please contact Elaine or Wilj*  
*of the Membership Guild.*

*Two by Abraham Lincoln:*

*The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just. ~*

*I care not for a man's religion whose dog and cat are not the better for it. ~*

***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

## **Challenge to Development of Walmart at Suburban Plaza**

by Linda A. Bell

For any who may not know, Selig Enterprises and Walmart have secured permits from DeKalb County for the development of a 149,000 square foot Supercenter at Suburban Plaza. This would be a huge store, adding considerably to the traffic, noise, and pollution in the area, including anywhere from 12 to 65 delivery trucks per day and an idling time of one hour per truck.

Good Growth DeKalb (GGD) has been formed with its primary focus on the redevelopment of Suburban Plaza, the Decatur shopping center located at the six-point intersection of N. Decatur Road, Scott Boulevard, and Medlock Road, an already challenging intersection. This grass-roots community organization is concerned that the developer and Walmart have not provided any plan to manage increased traffic, to incorporate pedestrian and bicycle safety, and to encourage the use of public transportation. This is especially important given that this development is to be located between four major hospitals.

In addition, GGD, along with many of us, is concerned with the way Walmart treats its store personnel, suspected shoplifters (one was killed in Lithonia by a security guard over Thanksgiving), and workers in locked factories in Bangladesh and elsewhere, some 112 of whom died recently in a fire.

GGD attorneys have uncovered violations of county law in the recent granting of permits to Selig Enterprises for this development and anticipate filing a lawsuit in the near future. GGD is greatly in need of funds to pursue this action. If you are interested in donating or learning more, go to the website: [www.GoodGrowthDeKalb.org](http://www.GoodGrowthDeKalb.org). Or you can attend a GGD monthly meeting on the second Tuesday of each month at 7 pm at N. Decatur Presbyterian Church, 611 Medlock Road, Decatur 30033. Good Growth DeKalb also has a rally scheduled for Friday, February 1, from 4:30 - 6 pm at Suburban Plaza and welcomes your attendance. ~

**Please 'like' us on Facebook! <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4334033295/>**

## **Community News & Activities**

--**The 2013 Bayard Rustin/Audre Lorde Breakfast** will be held Monday, January 21 at 10:00 am at St. Mark United Methodist Church, 781 Peachtree St Atlanta, GA 30308. The breakfast honors these two highly influential activists, provides space for fellowship, and enhances progressive coalition building among LGBTQ people and our allies working for social justice. For more information, go to the 2013 Rustin/Lorde Breakfast Facebook page.

--**Rev. R. Lanier Clance**, founder and minister emeritus of First E, turned 74 on December 18. Congratulations and all best wishes to dear Lanier from all of us.

--**Lost-n-Found Youth, Inc., and founder Rick Westbrook** were mentioned in an article in the *Huffington Post*. Congratulations to Rick and the group for their work with homeless LGBTQ youth.

--**House for rent**, Clarkston/Decatur, \$800/month, screened porch, fenced yard, close to MARTA. Available 1/15/2013. For more information, call 404-296-0809 or 404-457-3393.

--**Our Children's Program** needs a lockable supply cabinet, a first-aid kit, AA and D batteries, flashlights, and 9-volt batteries for smoke alarms.

*Continued on page 7*

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# January 2013 Sunday Celebrations of Life

**January 6**      *Building Community*  
**Speakers:**    *The Membership Guild*  
**Facilitator:**   *Rev. Marsha Mitchiner*  
**Accompanist:** *Richard Rifkin*

**January 13**    *TBA*  
**Speaker:**      *Rev. Lucas Johnson*  
**Facilitator:**   *Cindy Lou Who*  
**Accompanist:** *Alan Dynin*

**January 20**    *Am I Still Dreaming? What is the Dream?*  
                         *Who are the Dreamers?*  
**Speaker:**      *Rev. Janna Nelson*  
**Facilitator:**    *TBA*  
**Accompanist:** *Scott Hooker*

**January 27**    *Readings, Stories, and Reflections of the Season from Kate*  
*Hauk*  
**Speaker:**      *Rev. Kate Hauk*  
**Facilitator:**    *D. Patton White*  
**Accompanist:** *TBA*

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*We all come with various internalized meanings of spirituality. We enrich and expand our understanding as we learn to share and listen to one another, creating a sanctuary that honors diverse spiritual paths. ~ Rev. Janna Nelson*

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**Please consider  
a special donation to the Ramp/Lift Fund.  
We are over halfway to our fundraising goal!  
Many thank-you's to the Chalice Lighters, CPNO, and First E  
Members and Friends for your support.**

## ***Rev. Lucas Johnson to Speak on January 13***

Reverend Lucas Johnson will speak at First E on January 13. He was born in Erlangen, Germany, and grew up in Coastal Georgia with family roots in Live Oak, Florida. He has studied at Mercer University, Emory University, and the University of Goettingen (Germany), and was ordained to ministry by Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia.

Lucas identifies strongly with the tradition of freedom fighters who engaged in what is often known as the American Civil Rights Movement. In that spirit, he works regularly with such organizations as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, The Veterans of Hope Project, and the National Council of Elders.

Lucas serves on the International Committee of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and the board of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. He currently lives in Georgia, splitting his time between Savannah and Atlanta. ~

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## ***Antioch East Honors Edi Kelman For Early Edgewood-Candler Park BiRacial History Project***

During the Nov. 11th Sunday service at Antioch East Baptist Church, Edi Kelman was presented with a lovely plaque by Dr. John F. Williams, Pastor, and Dea. Alonzo Wright, Chair of the Deacon Board. Kelman's Existential spouse, Bill Read, was present with his support. The plaque reads: Presented to Sister Edith Kelman Read for her outstanding contribution to the Early Edgewood-Candler Park BiRacial History Project, Undying Faith Video Project, Antioch East Baptist Church Historical Markers, Remembering Rose Hill Project, and other African-American Historic Projects. ~

## **Award-winning Documentary *Slavery By Another Name* on January 18 at First E**

First E's Social Justice Guild is proud to present Samuel D. Pollard's documentary *Slavery By Another Name* (2012). Nominated for the Sundance Grand Jury Prize, this film was based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by the same title by Douglas A. Blackmon. (Blackmon spoke at First E shortly after the book's publication.)

In this documentary and in his book, Blackmon challenges one of our cherished assumptions--that slavery in this country ended with the Emancipation Proclamation. This documentary shows how even as slavery ended after the Civil War, new systems of brutal involuntary servitude took its place throughout the Deep South, including Atlanta.

The event is co-sponsored by the Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and First E's Social Justice Guild. A discussion after the film will be led by historian and DSA member Jeff Bragg.

Doors open at 7:00 pm, and the film starts at 7:30 sharp. Popcorn and refreshments will be available. Donations are welcome, \$1 to \$10 sliding scale suggested. No one will be turned away. ~

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## ***Community News & Activities continued***

--A **work day** will happen Saturday, January 12, to make final preps before hanging the strut in the attic for new lighting in the Sanctuary.

--**Let's fill up the Food Barrel.** Bring canned and packaged goods and nonperishables.

--**Drop Robert a line** if you have information to share at [rstewart@toyodausa.com](mailto:rstewart@toyodausa.com). ~

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*The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread. ~ Anatole France*

## *Good Wooden Floors for Dancing* by Duncan E. Teague

**If only I could find** the sermon from Rev. Lanier Clance that was preached that year on the Sunday of Martin Luther King's birthday, just after it became a national holiday. I remember the crowd of people that Sunday at the end of the 1980s. I also remember how I got to the doors of the congregation.

Not long before I heard that sermon, I was aligned with Black and White Men Together (BWMT) Atlanta. At this point in history, BWMT was thriving with close to one hundred men on the membership roles and far more on the mailing list. Remember when paper newsletters came folded and stapled, monthly in the mail? Many members were on the list by first name and last initial only. BWMT Atlanta had rented a church building for a Saturday night party, and I came in my most Tina Turner-like ensemble of that time—short black mini skirt, high heels, and hair everywhere. This must have been the late 1980s. I remember having an absolutely wonderful time. The floors of the building were perfect for dancing because of the old planks. The DJ, Freddie Daniels, was terrific. I would later have an artistic career with his younger brother, the late Tony Daniels, who had not yet moved from their home in Albany, Georgia. At the party I kept thinking to myself, "What kind of church rents their building to a group of gay men, and even an interracial group of gay men?"



It was the end of the holiday season, and I finally had all I could take of the traditional Christian literal Biblical messages. The messages left me confused and angry. I remembered the "church" that let us dance on the floors. I dared attend a Sunday service to see for myself. I believe Sabrina Sojourner, a friend and local activist, was already attending and what seemed like at least half the lesbians in Atlanta. I also ran into a dear friend from the BWMT Atlanta, Carl Owens. The music was familiar and engaging, but the words were not anything we ever sang in the National Missionary Baptist Church.

That King Birthday Sunday, Rev. Clance was fired up and at the same time gentle and caring. He was preaching, not just speaking, but he was saying things that made me feel whole and alive. I remember leaving with such gratitude for having found this place and for venturing outside of my tradition, my Christian upbringing. I had never heard of Existentialists, and I am not sure I was so concerned with that. I cared how I was treated.

I was doing HIV/AIDS work in the desert of homophobia, in the socially segregated queer community and the disinterested populations in the larger powerful regions of Atlanta. We gay men were dying of AIDS and it was as if no one cared. I never had to alter who I was to be inside the doors of the First Existentialist Church—soon to be "Congregation"—and I gained immediate support for my work in community. After a few years, I was given a much appreciated stipend from the congregation to support my work. That level of acceptance allowed me to be in the community that fostered my growth, maturity and acceptance into my call to ministry.

Thank you for allowing me to be with those memories of Rev. Lanier Clance when he appeared much healthier to us, at a time when the old, ugly metal folding chairs of the church were filled with Candler Park and Little 5 Points' radicals, Emory professionals, and lots of lesbians. It was a wonderful place to grow up philosophically and spiritually. I love that the floors are still some of the best for dancing, too. ~

*The First E Newsletter is published monthly. The deadline for submission of material for the February 2013 newsletter is January 13. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.*