

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 •

Claire Vohman's Art Opening March 1

Artist Claire Vohman's work returns to First E's walls on March 1. Claire says, "I always wanted to be an artist. I live in GA, and have lived in a few other states, SC, NC, CO, AZ, TN... and might try some more before it's all over. I've been making and selling reverse-painted windows and magnets since 1998. I've created many other items also, including a coloring book for adults in 1998. But nothing I've done has been as HOT as my new kitchen/bathroom towels. I have finally hit upon the perfect combination of art and usefulness that works so well with my images and sayings. I'm having so much fun creating these and selling and coming up with new designs.

"I've been inspired over the years by my dogs and cats. They were the best things to ever happen to me. As of now I have one wonderful cat, Charlene, a calico. I miss everyone else a lot, but I don't mind the new simplicity and ability to leave home for more than one night.

"I love to swim and walk in nature. Sounds cliché but how wonderful it is! Right now I live on a vineyard (muscadines) with 20 acres surrounding, just inside the Atlanta perimeter. There are chickens even. Woods... it's lovely."

Claire's art will be on the First E walls through the middle of April. ~



"King Rainbow Cat" by Claire Vohman. Photo by Glen Lopez.

**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
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Edith Covington,
office@firstexistentialist.org

Board of Directors:
D. Patton White, Chair
Bill Read, Treasurer
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Linda Bell
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Bill Laney
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Charlene Ball,
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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 of Directors

By D. Patton White, Board Chair

The Board of Directors met on Monday, February 1, 2016, in the sanctuary. The Board approved the request from the Old Stone Church Bi-racial History Project to print more maps of the historical area. The Board also approved the 2016 Fiscal Year Budget. Bill Laney reported that we are getting very close to having the automatic door opener installed. Office Administrator Edith Covington reported that rentals continue to be strong. Membership reported that we currently have 59 voting members who have pledged, and a number of friends, many of whom have also submitted pledges. The next meeting will be held on Monday, March 7, at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. On the agenda will be the initial planning for the Annual Congregational Meeting, which will be held on April 24, following the Celebration of Life. All are welcome to attend. ~

Community News & Activities

--Art by **Claire Vohman** will be on First E's walls March 1 through April. See story on front page.

--The Art Guild will meet on **March 16** at 5:00 p.m. in the first E Sanctuary.

--Arlene would be happy to know of anyone whose **kids need tutoring**.

Community:

--**Sister Harriet**, a women's spirituality circle, meets on the second Sunday of every month in the First E Sanctuary at 2:00 p.m. Rev. Angela Denise Davis leads the circle.

--**Sunday Assembly** holds its monthly meeting on March 20 at 6:00 p.m. in the First E Sanctuary. Sunday Assembly meetings are usually on the third Sunday of the month. To RSVP, go to <http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/events/226671093/>

--**Submissions and news for the April Newsletter** are due to Charlene by Sunday, March 20. Send to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. Contact **Robert Stewart** with your news and activities for his weekly e-newsletter: robertstewart369@gmail.com. ~

Calling All Artists!

The First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta is looking for visual artists--painters, photographers, collage artists, and more--to exhibit on the walls of our Sanctuary.

Our motto is "**Art on the Walls, All the Time!**" There is no charge to artists to exhibit. So if you are an artists interested in having a show on our walls, please contact Glen Lopez, Art Guild Chair, at 30307@comcast.net or call him at 404-681-5856. Or contact Charlene Ball at mcharleneball@yahoo.com .

Guild Reports

Art Guild

By Charlene Ball

The Art Guild announces that artist Claire Vohman's work will be exhibited on First E's walls from March 1 through April. In May, a photography exhibit sponsored by WRFG will go up. And work by artist Helen DeRamus will be featured in June and July. We are thrilled about these exhibits and hope that you will enjoy them. The Art Guild is Glen Lopez, Chair; Charlene Ball, and Patton White. ~

Membership Guild

By Elaine Gayle and Charlene Ball

We had a New Member recognition by Marsha Mitchiner during Sunday's COL on February 28 and a potluck following the service for the community and to welcome our new members. Membership will also have a kiddush for the opening of the new art exhibit by Claire Vohman on Sunday, May 1, following the COL. As always, we welcome anyone who is interested in being on the Membership Guild. Contact Wilj at cincomayo55 or Elaine at ergale@hotmail.com or speak to us after a COL service on a Sunday.

The Membership Guild coordinates **openers**--people who open the building, start the coffee, turn on the lights and heat or air conditioning, and put out songbooks and tambourines; and **greeters**--folks who welcome you with a smile as you enter the Sanctuary and hand you a bulletin. Openers are Elaine, Hank, Wilj, Stell Simonton, and Andy Weiskoff. The Guild also plans potlucks and kiddushes (a kiddush is a traditional light meal with bread, cheese, fruit, and beverages). Elaine Gale, Carol Sandiford, Hank Pfadenhauer, Robert Stewart, Bill Laney, Mary Howard, and Wilj Sturkey are members of the Guild.

If anyone would like to know more about the Membership Guild, including when their next meeting occurs, contact Wilj at cincomayo55@comcast.net or Elaine at ergale@hotmail.com. ~

Program Guild

By Charlene Ball

The Program Guild met on Tuesday, February 16, at 6:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary to plan the Celebrations of Life for the second quarter of 2016. We're pleased to announce that Dr. Pauline Rose Clance, clinical psychologist and a charter member of First E, will speak on April 24. Regular speakers Rev. Angela Denise Davis and Rev. Duncan Teague will return. Rev. DiAnna Ritola will speak in May, and First E member Barbara Van Helsingden will speak in June. Also, new guest speakers have been invited--stay tuned.

We would like to thank Bill Laney for his years of service on the Program Guild, and also for his tireless work on Building and Grounds. The new lighting, the new doors, and the improvements made to the porch are all due to Bill. Millions of thanks, Bill!

The Program Guild welcomes members and friends to attend our meetings. Our members are Patton White (chair), Linda Bell, Charlene Ball, Saralyn Chesnut, and Hank Pfadenhauer. If you would like to recommend a speaker, contact any one of us. To recommend a musician, contact Patton (patton@beacondance.org). If you would like to facilitate, contact Charlene (mcharleneball@yahoo.com). ~

Guild Reports continued on page 7

Social Justice Corner

A New Road to Peace

By Becky Rafter

Nuclear weapons and nuclear energy production feed a larger system of oppression. Georgia WAND understands that in order to address nuclear issues we must also address structural oppression. Because these concepts are veiled and vague, I'd like to break them down a bit.

First: systems of oppression. To me, it's more like a culture of power in which a lot of people – let's say 100 people – deliberately or not, work and make decisions that result in hurting a lot more people – let's say 10,000 people – as well as the Earth and its finite resources. These jobs and positions are more or less determined by class and therefore historically held by white, straight men. Quite frankly—their work is usually for other people's gain – let's say 1 person's – so in most cases, the person wielding power that ultimately harms others is not the one exponentially gaining. But they do have a job and they feed their families.

We all have roles in this centuries-long struggle of not living in a true democracy, whether we buy exploitatively made products or work for an exploitative company. But the benefactors of hurting others are often the multi-millionaires, the industry execs, politicians, and other folks with power. And in some cases, even they are not aware of the damage they're causing. But make no mistake: there are people at every level who are well aware of what they're doing and ordering, and whom they're killing and dominating. It is these people's collective spirit that has dictated the U.S.'s highly permissive culture of fear, violence, power, and commerce throughout history. Our culture, like our government, has been out of our hands for far too long. To take matters into our own hands, and to focus on the cultural change we can make, Georgia WAND stopped using language like “enemies” and thinking about our targets as “the other.” To hold down an analysis that centers humanity, it helps when we allow space for people to show up as their true selves.

"We must evolve our culture to value the collective good . . . "

Second: nuclear weapons. In fact, nukes aren't simply one part of the system: nuclear weapons and the policies and commercial nuclear reactors that support them, play an integral role in maintaining a hyper-militarized, elitist, genocidal society. The words sound strong. Perhaps even academic. But they are true. Nuclear bombs killed tens of thousands of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. For many, that was reason enough to hate the bomb and the commercialization of nuclear energy. And a strong movement was born. But it skipped my generation—Generation X. The speaker at my college graduation was Alice Walker. She focused on “the missing plutonium.” She was outraged, scared even. But my classmates and I did not understand what she was talking about. That was 1997. It wasn't until 2013, when I learned about the environmental contamination plaguing communities like Shell Bluff, that I awoke to the need to stop nuclear production.

Shell Bluff, in East Georgia, just south of Augusta, is sandwiched between the nuclear weapons plant Savannah River Site and nuclear power Plant Vogtle, which is constructing the first new reactors in the U.S. in 30 years. Tritium, plutonium, cesium, and other radionuclides have compromised the water, air, and soil in Shell Bluff, which is a primarily Black, working class community, and centered around family and church. In fact, across the world, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people have suffered immensely from exposure to radiation from nuclear production, testing, waste, and accidents. My hope is that the movement to fight alongside communities affected by nukes and to stop the contamination and the nuclear production beckons the next generation—a fierce, imperturbable group.

Nuclear weapons hold the system in place. That's what they were designed to do. The U.S. banked its national security and identity on the bomb. Behind the cloudy veil of the bomb, men made cruel, jaw-dropping decisions. Billions of dollars were invested in making more bombs and building capacity to make even more bombs. The federal budget was highjacked. U.S. values shifted even further toward accumulation of power. The atomic bomb pronounced that the U.S., however far it had come socially, was, at its core, committed to its history of imperialism, expansion, enslavement, exploitation, and genocide. The bomb said, no one can threaten this way of life.

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))) History Project Donor Challenge (((

**Greetings First E Folks! You can help us make the \$ match!!!
Friends of the Old Stone Church BiRacial History Project
will match up to \$600 in donations to the History Project.**

Please help support Early Edgewood-Candler Park BiRacial History!

)) Your monetary gifts will be doubled.

They are fully tax-deductible.

Donations of all sizes greatly appreciated. ((

Your gift will help cover office rental at First E for 2016.

Please write your check to:
**BiRacial History Project/ First E
PO Box 5567, Atlanta GA 31107**

With Grateful Thanks.... Edie Kelman, History Project Manager

As a congregation, we pledge to strive: To develop compassion toward others, within the congregation and without; To recognize the humanity and dignity of those who disagree with us, always giving them the benefit of the doubt; To listen with open minds, to be respectful, and to keep channels of communication open, especially when we disagree.

A New Road to Peace ~ continued from page 5

In actuality it threatens our very existence. It extinguished many lights with its poison. And it corroded the water, the air, the land.

When I go to Shell Bluff, I feel like we're at a crossroads. One paved, the other bright red Georgia clay. One lopes off toward nuclear power Plant Vogtle on its way to the river. It passes by a historic family church with a red tin roof. The other has deep tire tracks in its soft, colorful dirt. Arrowheads collect at the bend from the county filling in the road with gravel and sand after a heavy rain. It passes by households whose land was stolen through eminent domain. My colleague Bernice Johnson-Howard and I recently gave a presentation, which she named, "Water is the River of Life...Or Is It?" At the crossroads, I think about how poisoned the water is, but I also consider the power of water itself. And of all the elements that have been extracted, polluted, forever mutated or killed by nuclear production. I think about what it takes for a community and a small, grassroots organization like WAND to affect change when the targets are so colossal and with so many moving parts.

When I take a step back, I see that the dirt road connects two roads together, and those two roads connect other roads together, and so on and so forth, like streams that feed a gushing river. We are working to change the system in which these nuclear plants operate, but also to change the culture in which we live and work. Only then can we be successful in stopping nuclear production and contamination. We must evolve our culture to value the collective good, a sense of peace, freedom from fear, respecting Black lives, honoring feminine bodies, welcoming strangers, and ensuring that these elements, our core values, are not sacrificed to the war machine. We are building trust, growing, and creating new ways of being in relationship across differences. We are finding ways of working across sectors and ideologies. We are taking critical, deliberate steps to advance, first and foremost, the health and vitality of the communities that have been hit the hardest by nuclear production. And we take it from there. ~

How you can help:

Georgia WAND is calling on activists, organizations, congregations, and philanthropic partners to help us build justice for Shell Bluff. **Contact Che Johnson-Long to follow up: che@georgiawand.org.**

Contact your legislator immediately and ask them to support Rep. Stover's discharge petition to move SB 36, a groundwater contamination bill, from the House Natural Resources Committee to the House Rules Committee

Volunteer to help with the We Count Whistle Stop Tour for voter education and engagement in Fulton Burke Counties

Become a Georgia WAND supporter. Make your check to Georgia WAND Education Fund or go to www.gawand.org to make a secure online donation. Your gift is tax deductible.

Join our Georgia WAND Weekly email list to stay up to date on ways you can help us as and the larger movement for justice.

Georgia WAND is a 30+ year old women-led, independent organization, formerly the Atlanta chapter of Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament. Today we work at the intersection of environmental/racial justice, anti-nuclear, clean energy, women's political power, and the federal budget.

Becky Rafter is the Executive Director of Georgia WAND (Women's Action for New Directions).

Guild Reports Continued from page 3

Social Justice Guild

By Linda Bell

The Social Justice Guild met on February 7. The Guild meets every other month. Members remain active in various social justice projects, including writing for the Social Justice Corner in *The First Existentialist Newsletter*, sponsoring the Book Discussion Group, and taking part in community social justice activities. Guild members are Katrice Baker, Linda Bell, Saralyn Chesnut, Lorraine Fontana, Edi Kelman, Jan Lister, and Libby Ware. For the date of the Guild's next meeting, ask a member. ~

Speakers in March

March 6: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut

Dr. Saralyn Chesnut moved to Atlanta in 1973 and quickly became part of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) community. In 1983, at age 35, she decided to pursue a doctorate in Women's Studies at Emory University. In 1993 she became the first Director of Emory's Office of LGBT Life, a position she held until she retired in 2008. She was also an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Emory's Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts from 1994-2010, and taught Women's Studies as well as the first courses in Lesbian and Gay Studies ever offered at Emory. She is now a freelance writer, editor and researcher, and is active in SAGE Atlanta, an organization that provides services and advocacy for older LGBT people. She will speak on March 6 on "Women in Global Perspective." ~

March 13: Rev. George Tatro

George Tatro is the pastor of Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church which, because of refugee resettlement, is located in one of the most diverse square miles in the United States. He continues to build partnerships in the community, bringing together faith communities, NGO's, and community leaders, for the full flourishing of the community. George was a panelist at a discussion sponsored by Georgia State University at the Rialto Center: Refugees in Georgia: Separating Fact from Fiction. Rev. Tatro will speak on March 13 on "Refugees and Immigrants: Building Community and Dispelling Fear." ~

March 20: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

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. Marsha, who is the Fellowship Minister at First E, will speak on March 20. ~

March 27: Rev. Angela Denise Davis

Rev. Angela Denise Davis is a certified rehabilitation counselor and an ordained minister. She is a graduate of Clark Atlanta University and has a master of divinity from Vanderbilt University Divinity School and a master of science in rehabilitation counseling from Georgia State University. She worked as the admissions director at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and the continuing education director at American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee. She facilitates a spiritual collective, Sister Harriet, which she started in 2010. As a certified rehabilitation counselor, she helps blind and vision impaired individuals navigate their career path as the Career Development Services Manager at the Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI). She has been a freelance graphic designer for over 20 years. She currently sits on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and serves as vice-president. Rev. Angela Denise Davis will speak on March 27 on "What Was/Is." ~

March 2016 Sunday Celebrations of Life

- March 6** ***Women in Global Perspective***
Speaker: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut
Facilitator: Libby Ware
Accompanist: Alan Dynin
- March 13** ***Refugees and Immigrants: Building Community
and Dispelling Fear***
Speaker: Rev. George Tatro
Facilitator: Dr. Sharon Mathis
Accompanist: David Tyberg
- March 20** ***"It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time": Thoughts
On Perspective***
Speaker and Facilitator: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner
Accompanist: William "Bill" Chelton
- March 27** ***What Was/Is***
Speaker: Rev. Angela Denise Davis
Facilitator: Dr. Sharon Mathis
Accompanist: Charli Vogt

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Members and Friends Speak

Do you need help with anything? Do you want to learn about something? It's possible that one of us can help. Please see us at COLs on Sunday.

Services available from our members:

Rev. Marsha Mitchiner: Therapeutic massage, officiant for weddings, dedications, etc. revm@bellsouth.net.

Mary Howard, Math Instructor.

Joseph Verdell, Domestic services and pet sitting.

Bekkah Sperry: Babysitting, childcare.

Wilj Sturkey: Interior painting, minor home repairs.

Cindy Lou Who: Costume advice, stitching.

Carol Sandiford: Grocery shopping, preparing meals and delivering them. .

Kitty: Dance instructor--any dance (including hula and Argentine Tango. Singles, couples, groups.

Arlene Arp: Tutoring PreK-12, ESAL, adults, how to homeschool.



Services Sought:

Hank Pfadenhauer: is looking for someone to teach him about loud speaker design.

CHARTER FOR COMPASSION

Our Congregation is a Charter Partner of Compassionate Atlanta. By signing the Charter for Compassion, developed by theologian Karen Armstrong, we pledge to abide by the Golden Rule.

To see the Charter for Compassion visit their website:

www.charterforcompassion.org

The Existentialist is published monthly. Deadline for the April 2016 newsletter is March 20. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.