

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 •

Celebrate May Day with Activism in Atlanta Photography Exhibit

Story on page 6



"Black Lives Matter" by Steve Eberhardt

**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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Office Administrator:
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Board of Directors:
D. Patton White,
Chair; Stell Simonton,
Recorder; Mark White,
Treasurer; Charlene
Ball, Linda Bell, Saralyn
Chesnut, Bill Laney,
Mary Howard, Ted Pettus
Newsletter Editor:
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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, April 4, at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. Unfortunately we did not achieve a quorum of members, so no official actions were taken. The board heard updates from Marsha regarding the estate of Hank Pfadenhauer, concerns from member and Woodland Sanctuary chair Ashlea Davis regarding safety issues and the temporary closing of the Woodland Sanctuary to the general public, and discussed plans for the Annual Meeting to be held on April 24th. The Guilds and Committees shared updates. The Nominating Committee is presenting the following slate for consideration by the membership of First E for the 2016-17 Board: D. Patton White, Stell Simonton, Linda Bell, Bill Laney, Mark White, Ted Pettus, Saralyn Chesnut, Mary Howard and Charlene Ball. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:00 p.m. The Board will meet again on Monday, May 2, at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary—all are welcome to attend. ~

First E Board for 2016-17

At the First Existentialist Congregation's Annual Meeting, the new Board for 2016-17 was presented to the membership and elected. The members of the Board are as follows:

Charlene Ball, Linda Bell, Saralyn Chesnut, Bill Laney, Mary Howard, Ted Pettus, Stell Simonton, D. Patton White, and Mark White.

We welcome the new Board and wish them well! ~

Community News & Activities

--"Activism in Atlanta," a photography exhibit by Atlanta activists including First E member **Lorraine Fontana**, will be on our walls from May 1 through May 31. 1. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, May 7, at 5:00 p.m. at First E. See story on page 6.

--A discussion of Ta Nahisi's article "Reparations" will be held after the COL downstairs on June 19. All are welcome to attend.

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.

--**Submissions and news for the June Newsletter** are due to Charlene by Sunday, May 15. Send to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. Contact **Robert Stewart** with your news and activities for his weekly e-newsletter: robertstewart369@gmail.com. ~

Guild Reports

Art Guild

By Charlene Ball

The Art Guild met on April 13 at 5:00 p.m. in the first E Sanctuary to discuss art exhibits and other arts events at First E. "Activism in Atlanta," a photography exhibit of photos by Atlanta activists, will be on First E's walls from May 1 through May 31. The opening reception will be on Saturday, May 7, at 5:00 p.m. at First E. From June 5 until mid-July, paintings by artist Helen DeRamus will be featured. The opening reception will be on Sunday, June 5. Members of the Art Guild are Glen Lopez, Chair; Charlene Ball; Elaine Gale; and Patton White. All are welcome to attend. ~

Membership Guild

By Charlene Ball

The Membership Guild held a kiddush on Sunday, April 24, at the annual congregational meeting. Delicious snacks and drinks were available for us to knosh on during the meeting.

The Membership Guild consists of Elaine Gale and Wilj Sturkey, co-chairs; Mary Howard; Bill Laney; Carol Sandiford; and Robert Stewart. We welcome new members of the Guild. If you're interested in joining us, contact Wilj at *cincode-mayo55@comcast.net* or Elaine at *ergale@hotmail.com*. ~

Program Guild

By Charlene Ball

The Program Guild welcomes members and friends to attend our meetings. Our members are Patton White (chair), Linda Bell, Charlene Ball, and Saralyn Chesnut. Rev. Marsha Mitchiner also gives us input. For May's 5 Sundays, our lineup of speakers will be Rev. DiAnna Ritola on May 1; Rev. Duncan Teague on May 8; Rev. Marsha Mitchiner on May 15; Rev. Angela D. Davis on May 22; and an unconfirmed guest speaker on May 29. 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*).

We thank all our facilitators who give so generously of their time and energy in agreeing to be the "host" for our Sunday Celebrations of Life. You are key to the success of our Sunday COL services. ~

Social Justice Guild

By Linda Bell

The Social Justice Guild met on April 3. We meet 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. On June 19, we will hold a discussion of an article by Ta Nahisi Coates on the topic of reparations. At its last meeting, the Board approved a proposal by the SJG to purchase and hang a Black Lives Matter banner on the outside of the building. Guild members are Katrice Baker, Linda Bell, Saralyn Chesnut, Lorraine Fontana, Edi Kelman, Jan Lister, and Libby Ware. Our next meeting will be on June 5 downstairs after the COL service. All are welcome to attend. ~

March 2016 Finance Report

<u>2016 Cash Flow</u>	<u>Operating</u>	<u>Designated</u>
Total Income	16,544	10,036
Total Expenses	(18,115)	(2,219)
Net thru March 31	(1,571)	7,817

Fund Types & Names Account Balances on March 31

<unaudited>

2016 General Operating Account	(1,571)
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<u>Designated Purpose Funds</u>	38,525
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Use Where Needed Fund	1,461
In Memory of Estelle Whychoff	10,000
Sanctuary Accessibility	14,500
Children's Program	692
Leadership Development	750
Community Garden Labryinth	274
Building & Grounds	5,686
Woodland Sanctuary	1,343
Minister's Discretionary	1,029
Social Justice	1,286
Attic Insulation Fund	1,250
Music Fund	255

Pat Hewatt Revolving Loan Fund	8,068
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Total First E Funds	45,022
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<u>Old Stone Church History Project</u>	2,532
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*That's what I consider true generosity.
You give your all, and yet you always
feel as if it costs you nothing. ~ Simone
de Beauvoir*

History Project Donor Challenge

*Help support Early Edgewood-Candler
Park BiRacial History. Friends of the Old
Stone Church BiRacial History Project
will match up to \$600 in donations to the
History Project. Gifts are tax-deductible.*

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

*With Grateful Thanks.... Edi Kelman, History
Project Manager*

*Man can be the most affectionate and
altruistic of creatures, yet he's potential-
ly more vicious than any other. He is the
only one who can be persuaded to hate
millions of his own kind whom he has
never seen and to kill as many as he can
lay his hands on in the name of his tribe
or his God. ~ Benjamin Spock, pediatri-
cian and author*

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

Social Justice Corner

May Day: A History

By Dr. Saralyn Chesnut

The first question is, which history? Or maybe, a history of which May Day? This date has long been marked by observances in most parts of the world, but the kinds and meanings of the observances have varied across time and geographical location. In fact, historian Peter Linebaugh recently published a book titled *The Incomplete, True, Authentic, and Wonderful History of May Day*, in which he discusses the variations.

Linebaugh divides the histories of May Day into what he calls red stories and green stories. (Other historians call these the red roots and the green roots of May Day.) The green (his)stories are the ones most of us are familiar with: May Day marks the end of winter and the coming of summer, the planting of crops, the freshness of nature. People dance around Maypoles in celebration of life itself, and in many depictions of Maypoles with people dancing around them, the “people” are pretty young maidens, potential bearers of new life themselves. These celebrations go back many centuries and may have begun as pagan rituals.

[B]oth the red and the green histories of May Day are perhaps more relevant than ever—one pointed toward the green earth of which we are all a part, and the other toward the struggle for justice for all.

The first green May Day celebration in the United States was in 1627, in Merrymount, Massachusetts. According to Linebaugh, “Thomas Morton, with a ganymede, runaway servants, some former slaves and indigenous people, danced around the maypole. . . . It was a multicultural, antihierarchy, anticolonial assembly. And the Puritans in Boston came down heavy against it. They came down yelling, ‘God’s scarcity, be quiet, shut up!’” This put an end to such celebrations in the US for a time, but May Day celebrations that include maypoles and dancers still take place here and across the globe today.

The red version of May Day came out of the organized labor movement in the United States, and although it is celebrated on May 1, it is called not May Day but International Workers’ Day. May 1 became associated with the labor movement, and specifically with the drive for an eight-hour workday, when in 1884, at the national convention of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions (later the American Federation of Labor), leaders proclaimed that “eight hours shall constitute a legal day’s labor from and after May 1, 1886.” By that date bosses had not heeded their call for an eight-hour workday, and hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike across the United States.

In Chicago, on May 4, 1886, demonstrations and rallies in support of workers led to violence, resulting in what has become known as the Haymarket Riots or the Haymarket Massacre. Someone threw a bomb, and seven policemen and one civilian were killed. Eight of the demonstrators were arrested, and four were eventually hung. International Workers’ Day is also a commemoration of that event. Today it is an official holiday in many countries, but not in the US.

Over the past decade, larger red May Day demonstrations have begun to be held both here and abroad. This year’s demonstrations mark the tenth anniversary of those held in the US in 2006, when over 1.5 million people took to the streets to support workers’ and immigrant rights. As Amy Goodman of Democracy Now! notes, “It was one of the largest days of protest in the country’s history.” During this election year, when talk of revolutionary change is heard on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, both the red and the green histories of May Day are perhaps more relevant than ever—one pointed toward the green earth of which we are all a part, and the other toward the struggle for justice for all. ~

Celebrate May Day with Activism in Atlanta Photography Exhibit ~ By Barbara Joye

Celebrate May Day – also known as **International Workers’ Day** - by enjoying a new exhibit of photographs: “**Activism in Atlanta**,” that will hang in the sanctuary throughout the month of May. Sponsored by Metro Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America, the show features the work of six of Atlanta’s best photographers of people’s street action. You’ll see scenes from the King Day march, Moral Monday Georgia, Fight for \$15, School of the Americas Watch, Black Lives Matter, celebrations of same-sex marriage, and more. The show is presented in conjunction with the #MayDayATL festival being organized by Atlanta Jobs with Justice and many other progressive local groups (see AtlantaJwJ.org). You can meet the photographers at a reception with light refreshments at 5 pm, Saturday, May 5.

Photographers:

JIM ALEXANDER has spent over 40 years refining his art of documentary photography. A photojournalist, teacher, activist, entrepreneur and media consultant, Mr. Alexander has been on the scene at festivals, concerts, cultural events, rallies, demonstrations, meetings and marches, photographing events that guided the course of history.

CINDY BROWN is an award-winning photojournalist who has worked for major newspapers and now uses her life experiences and her Masters of Divinity degree as a wedding photojournalist in Atlanta. She enjoys working on personal documentary projects and agitating for social change.

STEVE EBERHARDT is an Atlanta-based photographer who believes that photography can help facilitate positive social change.

LORRAINE FONTANA, a native New Yorker, moved to Atlanta in 1968 to work for VISTA as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. She’s a founding member of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (1972-1994), and later Dykes for the Second American Revolution. Currently, she is active in many social justice organizations, including the First Existentialist Congregation’s Social Justice Guild and Metro Atlanta Democratic Socialists of America.

REID FREEMAN JENKINS picked up his father's 1940's Argus camera when he was 15 and discovered that he liked composing pictures in the viewfinder. His father showed him how to develop film and use the enlarger he had made out of a coffee can and other odds and ends. Reid then devoured photography books and magazines, took courses in school, and became a photographer in the Coast Guard. He has since pursued it as an art form, making his living in other ways. He moved to Little Five Points in the 70's, became active in the art community and directed the L5P Arts Alliance Gallery. He continues his passion for photography to this day.

MANUEL LLANERAS emigrated to the U.S. from Havana, Cuba in 1969. He has used his unique photography style for many years to document life at home and away. He currently works as a wedding photographer in Atlanta, GA. He considers his wedding photography an extension of his personal documentary and street photography work.

"Activism in Atlanta" will be on First E's walls until May 31. ~

***As scarce as truth is, the supply has always been in excess of the demand. ~ Josh Billings,
columnist and humorist***

A Short History of Curmudgeons and Snarks ~ Continued from back page

had, in his own words, lost his tolerance for anything cute or trendy, was out of step with nearly everybody, and had developed a permanent sneer.” In short order, he tells us, he got an unlisted phone number, divorced his wife, and managed to, again in his words, irreparably insult most of his friends and relatives. An ironically curmudgeonly way of describing the trajectory of his life.

He would probably also define himself as a quasi curmudgeon who went over at some point into the ranks of the constant curmudgeon, again in his view, not such a bad person to be in the modern definition of anyone with the temerity to point out insincerity and deception in an engaging and humorous manner.

While the ranks of so-called “famous” curmudgeons are peopled overwhelmingly with men — as seems to be the case with most fields of human endeavor by under-rating and oversight, there have been and continue to be women: Writer Dorothy Parker was indisputably world-class, and there was actress Tallulah Bankhead, and still very much with us social commentator Fran Lebowitz, who says things like: “Great people talk about ideas, average people talk about things, and small people talk about wine.”

If churlish and old have been dropped from the assumed definition of this character we call curmudgeon, and if the opposite is Pollyanna — then I am now happy to call myself one, as perhaps are many of you.

Who, like Fran Lebowitz, despite her barbed wit and daggers, also has said: “I place a high moral value on the way people behave. I find it repellent to behave with anything other than courtesy in the old sense of the word — politeness of the heart, a gentleness of the spirit.”

Numerous of our notable curmudgeons, foreign and native, would seem also to hold on to the notion of what might also be called social civility: respectful, considerate, and compassionate behavior that enables us to live and work together, embracing our shared humanity and interpersonal connections. If just by the genuine vehemence with which they verbally attack the lack of it, in this country in particular and not just in these times. Curmudgeonly comments from the likes of author Mark Twain who declared: “In our country, we have those three unmistakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either,” or from the late poet and critic Paul Goodman who observed that “the organization of American society is an interlocking system of semi-monopolies notoriously venal, an electorate unenlightened, misled by a mass media notoriously phony.”

Ouch – but who, despite cranky protestations otherwise, had and have a real stake in the game, who still held and hold on to the notion of something better: that shining city on the hill, that open, welcoming democracy they still believed, believe in somehow. Who stood and stand behind their pronouncements in very public ways. Who were and are engaged in a conversation, as frustrating and maddening the process and results. ~

Speakers in May

May 1: Rev. DiAnna Ritola

Rev. DiAnna Ritola received her ordination as an **Interfaith Minister** from The New Seminary for Interfaith Studies. Her ministry centers on spiritual counseling for sexuality and intimate relationships. She is a professional speaker on the integration of spirituality and sexuality. She has lived in cities large and small, explored her inner Earth Mother in rural Vermont where her two children were born, and moved to

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Speakers in May ~ Continued

Asheville, NC in 2001 and immediately joined the Unitarian Universalist Congregation where she is still a member. DiAnna is also on the clergy team with The Mother Grove Goddess Temple in Asheville. DiAnna is available for counseling sessions in person, or via phone or Skype, as well as weddings, commitment ceremonies and other rites of passage. Her website is www.DiAnnaRitola.com. DiAnna's talk at First E on May 1 is entitled "Some Things Are Broken, But I'm Okay." ~

May 8: Rev. Duncan Teague

Rev. Duncan Teague, an ordained Unitarian Universalist (UU) Minister and a longtime friend of and speaker at First E, will speak on May 8. His topic will be "In Lieu of Flowers." Of his topic, he says, "there may be far more important gifts we can give in honor of the First Mothers' Day." Duncan has more than twenty years of work in HIV/AIDS advocacy, prevention, education and research and is a recognized leader in the GLBTQ community. He is happily married to his husband, David Thurman. ~

May 15: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

Rev. Marsha Mitchiner is First Existentialist's Fellowship Minister. Growing up in middle Georgia, Marsha and her family were active members of their church. She served with Rev. Lanier 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. Her talk on May 15 is entitled "When the Roll is Called" ~

May 22: Rev. Angela Denise Davis

Rev. Angela Denise Davis will speak on May 22 on the topic "A Different World." Angela is a regular speaker at First E. She is a certified rehabilitation counselor, a freelance graphic designer, and an ordained minister, and she facilitates a spiritual collective, Sister Harriet, which she started in 2010. 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 lives in East Point with her partner Mary Anne Adams and their canine child Kasi. ~

May 29: Robin Biro

Robin Biro resides in Atlanta, GA, works for his family business, is a Director for the Democratic Party, and does extensive volunteer work in the area, his most passionate being as a mentor for the Respect Institute, which allows him to directly mentor youth in the Juvenile Justice System, in Foster Care, and in Atlanta's most underprivileged public schools. A political operative and LGBT rights activist since early adulthood, Robin was hired in 2008 to be a Regional Director on the Obama campaign, for which he worked in SC, NC, and GA. When the Obama campaign ended, at the age of 33 he enlisted into the U.S. Army as an Airborne Ranger candidate. He was selected, and is distinguished as the first U.S. Army airborne ranger to come out as openly gay while was serving in Ranger Regiment. He has completed two rotations in Afghanistan with the Joint Special Operations Task Force (America's Top-Secret Army), and completed his tour of active duty in 2013, at which time he enlisted into the U.S. Army Reserves. ~

May 2016 Sunday Celebrations of Life

- May 1** ***Some Things Are Broken, But I'm OK***
Speaker: Rev. DiAnna Ritola
Facilitator: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner
Accompanist: William Chelton
- May 8** ***In Lieu of Flowers***
Speaker: Rev. Duncan Teague
Facilitator: D. Patton White
Accompanist: Aviva and the Flying Penguins
- May 15** ***When the Roll is Called***
Speaker: Rev. Marsha Mitchiner
Facilitator: Cindy Lou Who
Accompanist: David Tyberg
- May 22** ***A Different World***
Speaker: Rev. Angela Denise Davis
Facilitator: Lorraine Fontana
Accompanist: Alan Dynin
- May 29** ***TBA***
Speaker: Robin Biro
Facilitator: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut
Accompanist: Charli Vogt

The Back Page

Members and Friends Speak

A Short History of Curmudgeons and Snarks

© April 2016 Marti Keller

(This article was taken from a talk given by Rev. Marti Keller on April 15 at First E.)



A few weeks back I was asked to be one of the eulogists at a memorial service for an octogenarian man who had just died. To pay tribute to him, along with others who had loved him well.

I said what I said with great affection for a man I first met more than 20 years ago as fellow congregant and later as one of his ministers. In fact, it was with the hearty approval of his widow that I elected — and perhaps was selected — to speak about one unmistakable aspect of his personality, his way of being in the world.

I recalled that day that the Frank I came to know was quite obviously a curmudgeon. Which might, at first hearing, sound like a huge insult. As writer Jon Winokur — who has described himself as having been in a bad mood since 1971 — tells us in his book, *The Portable Curmudgeon* — dictionaries define curmudgeons as churlish, irascible folks. Cantankerous would be another good word. Grouchy another.

But Winokur's sense, and a more contemporary way of looking at curmudgeons, is that they are not unlikeable at all. They don't hate humankind, just humankind's excesses. They are just as sensitive and soft hearted as the next person, but they hide their vulnerability beneath "a crust of misanthropy." They ease pain by turning hurt into humor. They snarl at pretense and bite at hypocrisy out of a healthy sense of outrage. Their weapons are irony, satire, sarcasm, and ridicule.

Their targets are pretense, pomposity, conformity, and incompetence. They find these in subjects from A-Z: from the generally sorry state of America: "An asylum for the sane would be empty in America." (George Bernard Shaw) to marriage: "The surest way to be alone is to be married." (Gloria Steinem) to the whole world: "It's a man's world, and you men can have it." (Rita Mae Brown).

World class curmudgeons? Robert Frost, Groucho Marx, George Bernard Shaw, Mark Twain. Grumps and truth-tellers like H. L. Mencken who once said, "The most common of all follies is to believe passionately in the not true. It is the chief occupation of humankind."

The editor of this collection of curmudgeonly statements admits that he "gained the courage to come out of the closet, to go from an isolated would-be iconoclast to an out-in-the-open curmudgeon when he discovered that he

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The Existentialist is published monthly. Deadline for the June 2016 newsletter is May 15. Send your articles and announcements to mcharleneball@yahoo.com. The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.