

# 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

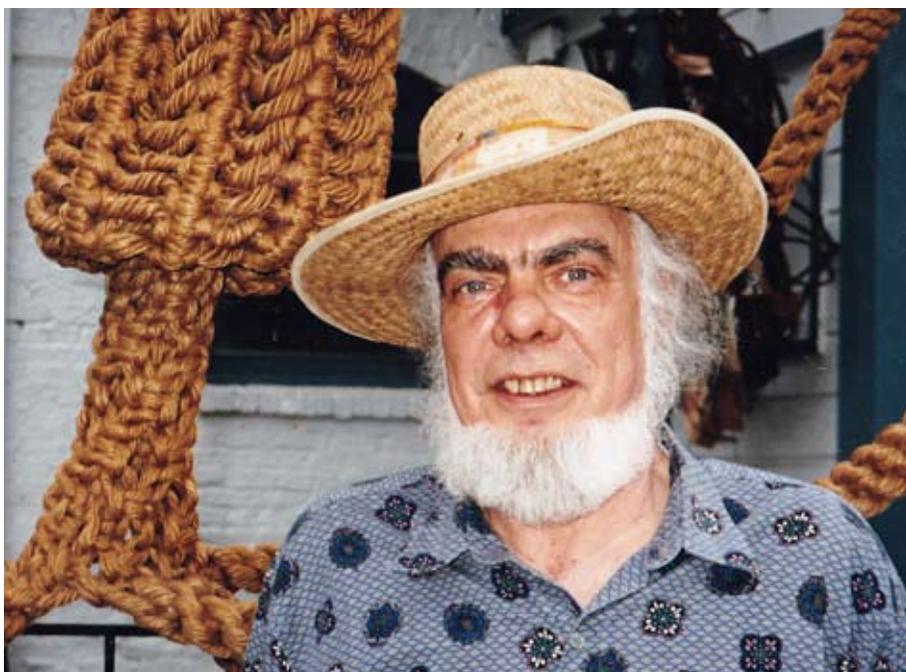
and Founded on Existentialist and Feminist Principles •

## Rev. R. Lanier Clance December 18, 1938 - April 15, 2013

*by Charlene Ball*

**First E's founding minister, Rev. R. Lanier Clance**, died on Monday night, April 15, 2013. Outpourings of love, grief, and appreciation have appeared in Facebook messages, emails, and in print. Lanier had an extraordinary impact on many lives, communities, organizations, churches and congregations.

Lanier Clance grew up in rural north Florida, began preaching at a Disciples of Christ congregation in Virginia, attended a Unitarian seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and became the minister of a Unitarian congregation in Ohio. Moving to Atlanta in 1973, he began the First Existentialist Church (later Congregation) as a study group in his home, later moving to the Decatur YMCA. In 1979, the congregation moved to its present home in "the Old Stone Church" at 470 Candler Park Drive.



*Lanier Clance with jute sculpture by Edith Kelman. Photograph by Franklin Abbott.*

Lanier was drawn to the Existentialist philosophy of Kirkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre. "Sartre, with his ethical imperative which says that anyone else's lack of freedom diminishes me, has been particularly central

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**First Existentialist  
Congregation of  
Atlanta**

470 Candler Park Drive,  
NE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30307  
404-378-5570  
[www.firstexistentialist.org](http://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

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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 Board** met on Monday, April 1, 2013. Donna Palmer from the Candler Park neighborhood visited the Board meeting to tell us about preliminary discussions that are taking place regarding a Candler Park Farmers Market, which will probably start with one farmer and some of the area markets. She asked if they could use First E's side yard. We agreed, pending a contract with them.

Randy Pimsler has found out that we will need to apply for a parking variance in connection with the Special Use Permit (SUP). (Since the meeting our SUP application has been approved by The City of Atlanta's Zoning Review Board. The parking variance application is in process.)

Andy has designed signs and a banner for the Dr. Von Donut food booth for the 420 Fest food booth that will take place April 19, 20, and 21. Ted told us about teaming with Dr. Bombay, who will provide the ice cream, send interns to staff the booth, and split the profits. This is going to be a major fundraiser for the ramp and for indoor lighting. Thanks to Ted and Andy for all the planning.

Karla has ordered a sign for the outside basement door directing people to enter through the sanctuary during the Children's Program, and has made a sign for the door to the stairs advising that the greeter has the key as part of our Security Program.

We talked about Philip Conover's (from Sharon Mass.'s break-out congregation) talk at First E. Karla was impressed with how they defined themselves as a generous, giving congregation instead of focusing on what was wrong with themselves in order to grow. Libby liked how they framed building a ramp as a social justice issue.

We went outside to decide on where the free bicycle racks will be located. They will be on the northern side of the sanctuary set back a few feet from the sidewalk in order not to interfere with the place we often put a tent when we have outside activities.

Karla will start organizing the Wednesday Night Suppers after tax season. Yea, Karla!

The next Board meeting will be on May 6. ~

## **Community News & Activities**

--**Book discussion** of Chapter 3 of *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander on May 26. Please bring snacks to share.

--**Congregational Retreat happens May 3-5, 2013**, at The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center in the North Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains. This retreat will be all about fun and fellowship with some educational sessions planned by congregational members. You can go online and register at [www.mountaincenters.org](http://www.mountaincenters.org). Click on the on-line registration link. If you would like to present a workshop or educational session or have ideas about activities, contact Libby Ware, Phyllis Thakis, Karla Crawford, or Rev. Marsha Mitchiner.

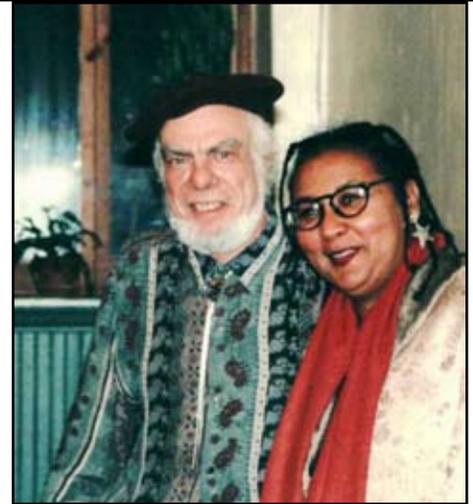
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## *Rev. R. Lanier Clance - continued from page 1*

to my outlook," he said in an interview with Scott Hooker in *The Existentialist* (October 2001). He credited the work of Simone de Beauvoir and other feminist philosophers with "ideas about community that provide a balance to the darker and more individual-oriented" thought of other Existentialists.

Lanier was always an activist for peace and social justice. He marched in countless anti-war demonstrations from Vietnam to the gulf War. He was part of nearly every Gay Pride march in Atlanta. He marched against the Klan, for nuclear disarmament, and went to jail as one of the "Roadbusters" who blocked bulldozers and planted trees to oppose the proposed Stone Mountain Freeway. He supported many community organizations, including Gay Spirit Vision, the African American Lesbian and Gay Alliance, Black and White Men Together, Men Stopping Violence, ZAMI, the Atlanta Lesbian Cancer Initiative (now the Health Initiative), and Charis Books and More/ Charis Circle. He co-hosted a radio program on WRFG with Franklin Abbott for several years, and he attended most concerts of the Atlanta Feminist Women's Chorus, where he could be seen at concerts on the front row, resplendent in holiday garb.

Lanier provided a model for a way to live in the world, as a man rejecting machismo. He was a philosopher who valued both reason and the irrational, and he showed how to live and honor both. He showed how one can live as both an activist and an intellectual. His legacy will be the many communities and individuals that he helped to survive, and this legacy of love and work will continue to honor him. ~



*Lanier Clance with author bell hooks.  
Thanks to Charis Books and More/  
Charis Circle for photograph.*

## *Rev. Marsha Mitchiner:*

**Lanier was my minister, my mentor and friend.** I loved his Sunday Celebration of Life messages even those times when it took a few days for the meaning to sink in and then surface as a gift of newfound knowledge and awareness. His words and way of being present; his gentle way of accepting me where I was while encouraging me to expand and move forward; his inviting me into his ministerial training program and supporting my ordination; and his way of always letting me know I am loved will continue to influence who I am, how I love and the vision I create of a more caring, peaceful world. ~



*Left to right: Nancy Zumoff, Lanier Clance, Franklin Abbott, Pauline Rose Clance.  
Photograph by Everett Herren.*

*Never doubt that a  
small group of com-  
mitted citizens can  
change the world;  
indeed, it is the  
only thing that ever  
has. ~ Margaret  
Mead*

## ***In Our Missing Lanier Who Could See Things*** ***by Duncan E. Teague***

My ministry began many years ago, probably in my youth, before I was mature enough to ever claim such a word. I know that when Lanier and I became friends he recognized me as an activist and possibly a minister. It was not long before he was promoting my work as if I were a "professional" and supporting it as such through the congregation. It was as if I believed his encouragement and actions to be true for me. This was the kind of mentorship that I needed and did not know at the time. I have been comforted by his open and affirming sermons when I did not want to hear dogma. That same powerful justice seeking spirit was present between us as he made his departure from this life. I did not always agree with Lanier, but I believe he desired most and returned my respect and love and not an unquestioning devotion. I will continue to pursue my ministry knowing that Lanier believed in it, before I did. What a magnificent friend. ~

### ***Robert Stewart:***

Lanier was a man raised in rural north Florida, surrounded by bigotry & narrow minds, who became a champion of social, political, and moral justice, a citizen of the world who lived in synchrony with his evolving beliefs. Lanier stood for minority rights when it meant pressure & concern for one's safety, for women's rights when it meant opprobrium & ridicule, for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people when it invited violence, and for freedom from fear in all walks of life. His life, as well as his teaching, is an example for any person interested in humanity. He stood for dignity and respect of every person, especially those marginalized, dispossessed, or excluded from 'normal' society. Lanier told about the time he was serving a congregation in West Virginia. The church was small, but generous to Lanier and welcomed him even as he was questioning what the Bible's meaning might be. Lanier said during that year he preached 52 sermons on "God is love." Nothing about punishment, nothing about exclusion, nothing about us-vs-them, nothing about one group being better than another, just a weekly reminder that the highest value is love. A shy man, troubled by dyslexia, who read pages in his books multiple times to be able to get and hold the meaning, who practiced preaching

### ***Third Friday Film Series***

#### ***The Last Mountain***

***Friday, May 17, 2013***

***Doors open 7:00 pm – film starts at 7:30 pm***

***Popcorn and refreshments available***

***Donations welcome - \$1 to \$10 sliding scale***

***No one turned away***

***Co-sponsored by Stop Plant Vogtle***

***Discussion after the film***

***led by Courtney Hanson, Outreach Director,  
WAND (Women's Action for New Directions)***

in the woods to overcome his fear of public speaking, from a part of Florida with strong military ties, became a therapist to help individuals, a minister to lead groups interested in moral values and justice, and a voice for an example of compassion, justice and love, wherever he went. ~

### ***Phyllis Thakis:***

**L**Laughing

**A**Activist

**N**atural

**I**Inspiration

**E**nergetic

**R**evolutionist

### ***Wednesday Night Suppers and***

***Ukeleles!***

***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.***

***Ukelele Practice After Supper-Bring your ukelele***

# Social Justice Corner

You're invited to the  
**Third Annual  
Fellowship in the Park-  
Sharing the Spirit  
of History.....**

**When: May 19, 2013**

**Where: Candler Park**

**1500 McLendon**

**Atlanta, GA**

**Time: 12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.**

**\* Antioch East Baptist Church \***

**\* First Existentialist Congregation \***

**\* Candler Park**

**Neighborhood Organization \***

**Food Fun Games**

**SPECIAL VOLLEY BALL**

**CHALLENGE!!!!!!!**

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## **100 Mary Lin Third Graders Walk Biracial Project History Tour**

*by Edith Kelman, BiRacial History Project Manager*

On April 5th, five classes of Mary Lin third graders took an educational local history walk in the Candler Park neighborhood. Teachers and parent-volunteers introduced the students to four sites along the BiRacial History Walking Tour. They followed Candler Park Drive to McLendon Avenue, stopping to learn some of the history of Mary Lin School, the Old Stone Church, the Evening Star Lodge, and the Rose Hill Community. Then they walked on to have lunch at Fellini's Pizza.

At a teacher's special request, the BiRacial History Project opened up the Old Stone Church/First E for the students to come inside the sanctuary. They explored the space and structure, as well as historic photos from the 1940s during the time of Antioch East Baptist Church. A good number of students, both boys and girls, recognized the portrait of Susan B. Anthony also on display.



*Scenes from 2012 Church in the Park with Antioch East and First E Members*



We are delighted that Mary Lin School is engaging their students and families with the inclusive history of the neighborhood in creative ways. ~

**Please 'like' us on Facebook!**  
**[https://www.facebook.com/  
groups/4334033295/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/4334033295/)**

## ***Lisa Cottrell:***

**Lanier was one of my mentors, my minister, and for a short time, one of my therapists.** He once asked me, "When are you going to grab what you want?" He was a beloved eccentric father figure to many of us in Atlanta (perhaps especially to the many LGBTQ First E members who he loved and gave a safe place to gather and celebrate), philosopher, humanist, feminist, artist, community builder, atheist, radical, lover of art, clothing, people, and glitter! May his legacy, the vibrant First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta and his contributions to the community, continue to provide inspiration and refuge. He will be missed. ~

## ***Rev. Melanie Morel-Ensminger:***

**I write in honor of our recently departed colleague Lanier Clance.** Receiving the short UUMA email with the note that a more full bio would be forthcoming, I almost laughed out loud. A full bio of Lanier would be very long indeed.

Those who knew Lanier in his heyday will have to pen their own reminiscences. I only knew him beginning in the 1990's when I was called to serve our church in Chattanooga, and so have only haziest ideas of his "red" days, his trips to Russia, and his free and radical ministry. But as the eccentric founding pastor of the small free-thinking First Existentialist Church of Atlanta, I can tell you this: he was a kind and generous colleague. He once drove up the 2 hours from Atlanta to Chattanooga to console and commiserate with me, brand-new minister as I was that he hardly knew.

When another female colleague in the greater Atlanta area was having ministry difficulties, he spoke up forthrightly on her behalf. On presenting his odyssey at SEUUMA at The Mountain, he overwhelmed us all by gifting his colleagues with the entire contents of his ministerial library, rare 19th and even 18th century books that had been given to him by a gracious older colleague at the start of his ministry.

A lot of things will be said and recalled about Lanier Clance, and most of them will be both true and off-the-charts, but I hold him dear as a generous and giving colleague, always with a hand extended to the ministers coming behind him.

Bless you, Lanier, in whatever afterlife there may be for existentialist saints. ~

## ***Rev. Hilary Landau Krivchenia:***

**It was with great sadness and sudden tears** that I learned, from a friend on Tuesday of the Reverend Lanier Clance's death on Monday night. I knew Lanier for a few years in Atlanta. He was ill for a very long time -- with congestive heart failure and I am convinced that the love and care of his partners and his skeptical faith community kept him alive for longer than we might have feared. He was a brilliant, creative, and complicated man. It was Lanier who first inspired me to the ministry. It was at the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta that I actually heard my first sermon and his words electrified me and called me onto this path. As Melanie wrote, his bio would be quite long and interesting. I know that he was heartbroken after the events of the Black Empowerment Controversy and never quite recovered his confidence in Unitarian Universalism. Yet he was, in so many ways, a true Unitarian Universalist -- as well as a dedicated existentialist. He used to travel to Paris every other summer and study and play. He brought energy and spontaneity to the pulpit -- walking about the front of the sanctuary and speaking from his heart -- with passion. Worship was exuberant, the music lively, using an old hymnal from a California UU congregation, and then we would grab tambourines, rattles, and clap our hands. He was a positive champion of human rights. The First E performed same sex unions for as long as I can remember. There was always a strong contingent of E's at the huge Atlanta pride March. He created a real refuge for LGBT persons, while at the same time, making it fully welcoming to those who were straight but not narrow. The congregation has never burgeoned in the way that he (or I) might have hoped -- but it was a sweet, small place.

I met Duncan Teague there years ago -- a sprightly, dedicated, full-on activist with a shining spirit. He had a real gift for the ministry and I am glad to see that he is firmly on this path.

He nurtured new ministers and freely shared his library, learning, time, and insights. When I shared with him my feeling of calling to the ministry, he supported and guided me. I remember his positive excitement when he told me of a book he loved and wanted me to read right away and

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then handed me an ancient and quite worn copy of the Treatise on Atonement. What he did not expect was that I would go back to Unitarian Universalism -- and not into the ministry he was trying to create at the First Existentialist Congregation (which had been originally called Church -- but changed its name in the 80s to be more inclusive.)

Lanier was a character. I remember his white Cadillac, his fancy suits -- he wasn't wealthy but he believed that a minister should sport a little bling -- just for the fun and spoof of it. I loved his sense of play.

Yes, he was a man with lots of quirks and idiosyncrasies -- but he was a rare and fine soul and I am grateful to have known him. I know so many people whose lives were healed, inspired, comforted, and even transformed by Lanier Clance. I wish there were a heaven and he might be grabbing coffee with Camus or absinthe with Sartre right now.

In gratitude, Hilary ~

## **More Words About Lanier:**

*Lanier = Love - Anneliese Singh ~ loving and gentle man with fiery spirit - Debra Moore*  
*~ **Maverick - Terry Simerly** ~ Lanier: gentle as silk, strong as steel, curious as a child, brave as a bear, true as the friend that never forgets yet always forgives.*  
*- in memoriam, Dan DeNoon ~ Lanier was my valued colleague, office mate and an exemplary existential psychotherapist. His wit, charm and intelligence were captivating. - Doris S. Gordon ~ Lanier: Amazing insight, brilliance and spirituality. His essence stays with me. Forever. - Mary M. Pike ~ Original - Shelby S ~ Mentor - Lisa C ~ **AMAZING!!!! - GARETH F** ~ Life-changing - Emily S ~ ANCHOR - Carol H ~ SPARKLES - Anon ~ *Dear Friend - Bill L* ~ Shiny things, Twinkle lights - Karla ~ Pioneer: In thought, in action, in dress, in words. I will be eternally grateful to him for bringing together the people who bonded and started the First E. It has left an indelible mark on me and changed my life, for the better, forever. - Anon ~ *Awe and amazement that he could take a bunch of left-over hippies and keep the spirit and character of First E going for 35 years! And I will never forget his unwavering kindness and support to Mark. (And neither will Mark!)* - Lynn T ~ From my first encounter at the age of 21, Lanier and 1st E provided me with a safe harbor and a place to find my authentic voice in the world. He has been my mentor, wise teacher, therapist and friend. So thankful! - Carol C ~ **Lanier's liberating personal impact on many individuals and his deep commitment to activism in the cause of social justice for all are part of his unique, creative legacy. His presence on this earth will be missed and resonate like a song in the lives of so many he has touched.** - Edi K ~*

# *Time*

*by Lisa Cottrell*

*is the thing we can not see or feel  
until it's gone  
the innumerable sands of broken shells  
against infinite blue skies  
the words you said to ease  
that made me laugh  
the echoes of a place of refuge  
words and deeds  
singing  
words and deeds unsaid  
undone  
their small beauty wracked against my heart  
an offering of tears, of choices  
morning  
drops of dew offered up from the ground  
before the heat draws them skyward like a prayer*

*that no one believes in any more  
but I know you  
your crinkly eyes and wild hair  
sleeping with books that you might learn more  
the way you bite your lip  
to chew on de Beauvoir  
man with plum beret and glitter  
loving life  
making art  
the practice:  
choice  
invitation  
celebration  
of this precious life  
continues  
likes specks of stardust  
against the night sky.*

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# *Legacy*

*by Franklin Abbott*

*to move ahead  
we must leave our dead  
in the grave of time  
grief is that slow slow  
recessional  
from the day of their departure*

*sometimes we pull against  
the rubber bands of our destiny  
strain as we may against gravity  
we can't return  
every dream where we do  
we wake up from  
love lives on in love*

# **May 2013 Sunday Celebrations of Life**

- May 5**            *Lines of a Map*  
*Speaker: Duncan Teague*  
*Facilitator: Kitty Wimbish*  
*Accompanist: Alan Dynin*
- May 12**           *Honoring Mothers: Valuing Mothers as Full Women*  
*Speaker: Mona Reeves*  
*Facilitator: Lorraine Fontana*  
*Accompanist: Richard Rifkin*
- May 19**           *Mother, May I?*  
*Speaker: Rev. Janna Nelson*  
*Facilitator: D. Patton White*  
*Accompanist: Scott Hooker*
- May 26**           *Readings, Stories and Reflections of the Season--from Kate Hawk*  
*Speaker: Rev. Kate Hawk*  
*Facilitator: Bill Laney*  
*Accompanist: Charli Vogt*
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## **Community News & Activities - continued from page 2**

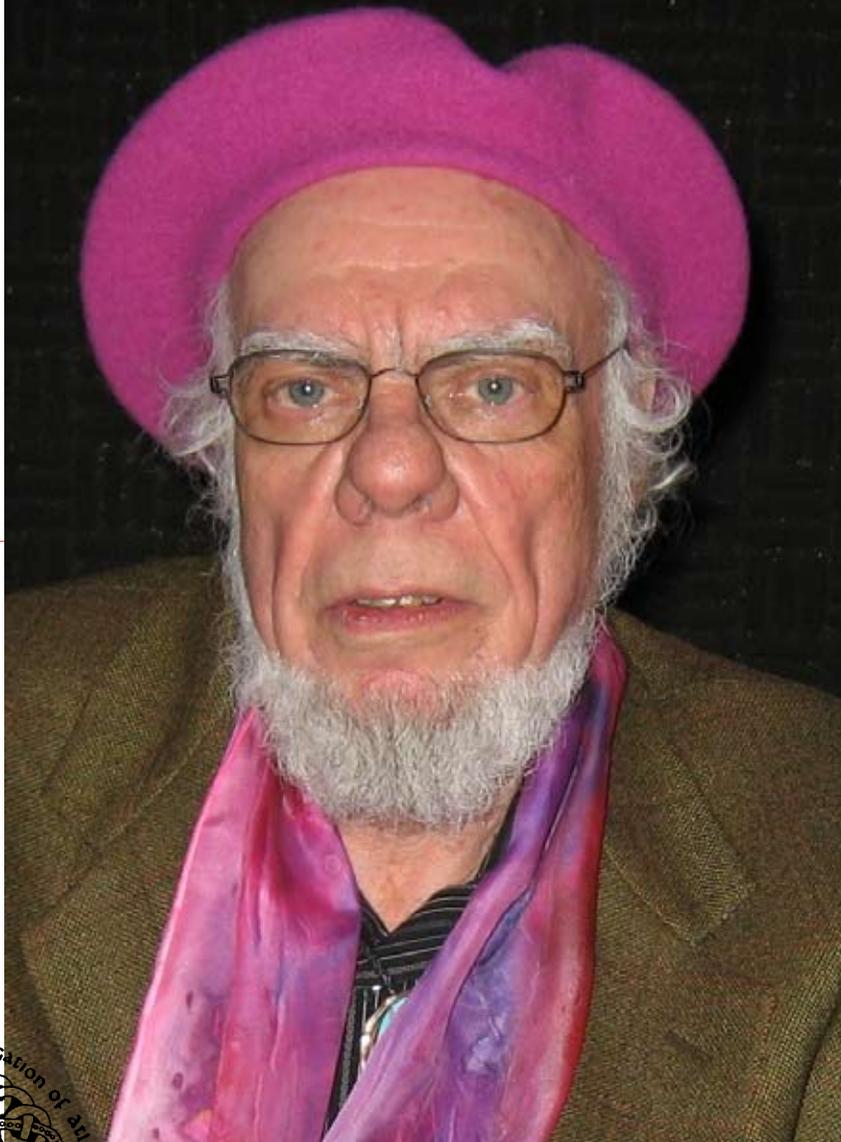
--Wednesday Night Suppers/Potlucks at First E start around 6:30-7:00, plus ukuleles and instruction.

--Several hundred mini-lights have been installed in the R. Lanier Clance Woodland Sanctuary in memory of Lanier. If anyone would like to walk though the Woodland the combination to the lock is 10-16-10. Thanks to Bill Read and Wilj Sturkey for helping Ashlea string the lights, and thanks to Betsy Henderson, Karen Thornton and Kitty Wimbish for donating them.

--The Annual UUA Assembly for Mid-South District will be held in Atlanta April 26-27 at UUCA with the theme "May You Live in Interesting Times." Learn what's been transpiring, what action still needs to be taken and participate in activities designed to help congregational representatives imagine and feel the positive impact of the changes coming our way. To register, go to <http://fd8.formdesk.com/swuuc1/MSDAA>

--Contact Robert Stewart with your news and activities: [rstewart@toyodausa.com](mailto:rstewart@toyodausa.com) . ~

# The Back Page



*If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you. ~ Gnostic Gospel of Thomas*