

# 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 •

## *First E Speakers in October*



Clockwise from top left: Rev. Angela Denise Davis, Franklin Abbott, Vanessa Jackson, and Dr. Jean Heinrich. More information on these wonderful speakers on page 7.



**First Existentialist  
Congregation of  
Atlanta**

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NE  
Atlanta, Georgia 30307  
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[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 D. Patton White, Board Chair**

The Board of Directors met on Monday, September 14. The board addressed a portion of the results from their recent retreat and focused the discussion for 30 minutes on the programming of First E. It was suggested that a social gathering time take place before each COL, about 15 minutes. This would encourage members to arrive earlier. A program for 12- to 18-year-olds might encourage younger family members to attend. We should find out what the local community would like to see presented: for example, workshops to develop individual interests and talents. Which guilds and committees would these fall under? The board will continue to refine these ideas into actual proposals for action in the coming months. The board also heard reports: Old Business: Mark and Cindy Lou researched new microphones and made several suggestions. Report from staff: Marsha reported on Nathaniel's condition and progress. Edith Covington discussed income from rentals and tenants. Elaine met with a preservationist regarding installation of a new floor and discussed the options we have. Cindy Lou reported that Stephanie asked for a separate storage space. Edith presented the current records of the congregation's finances. Membership Guild will prepare a potluck on Founders Day. ~

## **Community News & Activities**

--A Facilitators' workshop will meet on Sunday, October 4, after the COL. If you would like to facilitate at the COL or if you already facilitate, come share tips and challenges, learn, and practice. Bring snacks to share.

--The Book Discussion Group meets on Sunday, October 18, after the COL. We will discuss Chapter 4 of *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Joy DeGruy. All are welcome.

--Libby Ware will celebrate the publication of her first novel *Lum* at a book release party and booksigning at Charis Books on Wednesday, October 28, at 7:30 p.m. Come celebrate with Libby!

--November 1 will be Day of the Dead, a popular holiday in Mexico and one that First E has long celebrated. Marsha Mitchiner will speak, and an altar will be set up for members to bring mementos, photographs, and even food to remember those who have passed on.

--Heads up, Guild members: November is Guild Month. Each active guild will make a brief presentation to the congregation.

### **ONGOING:**

--First E Liberation Ukulele Group meets 1st, 3rd, and 4th Wednesday evenings for fun, practice & community (at First E around 7:30 start time, including instruction available once monthly. All levels of expertise are welcome. Call Wilj at 404-626-4763 for information.

--Geek Chorus meets on Second Wednesdays. Bring your favorite beverage to share, love offering to First E for allowing us to use the space, and musical instruments to pluck, bang or strum.

--Lost-n-Found Thrift and Consignment Store, 2585 Chantilly Drive, is open M-Sat 10-5; Sundays noon-6. Lost-n-Found, which helps homeless GLBTQI youth, was founded by our former office administrator, Rick Westbrook.

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## ***Guild Reports***

### ***Program Guild*** ***By Charlene Ball***

**In October, the Program Guild has scheduled the following speakers:** Rev. Angela Denise Davis will speak on October 4 on "When Opportunity Knocks"; on October 11, Dr. Jean Heinrich will bring us the message that "Existentialism Rocks"; on October 18, Dr. Vanessa Jackson will speak on "Wounding, Healing, and Recovering Meaning: Tools for Transforming Powerlessness into Power"; and on October 25, Franklin Abbott will speak on "Time and Time Again." We will have as facilitators D. Patton White, Dr. Sharon Mathis, Lorraine Fontana, and Dr. Saralyn Chesnut.

Speaking of facilitators, we will hold a Facilitators' Workshop on October 25 after the service in the sanctuary. All current facilitators as well as members who would like to be facilitators are invited to attend and participate. This will be a hands-on workshop, and snacks will be available. Please bring your helpful hints and questions.

The next meeting of the Program Guild will be on November 3 at 6:00 p.m. All members and friends are welcome to attend. ~

### ***Membership Guild*** ***By Charlene Ball***

**The Membership Guild sponsored a potluck on Founders Day.** They continue to welcome new members and newcomers, by providing greeters at each COL. The Guild also coordinates the openers, who open the building, start the coffee, turn on the lights and heat or air conditioning, and put out songbooks and tambourines. The Membership Guild is composed of Elaine Gale, Carol Sandiford, Hank Pfadenhauer, Robert Stewart, Bill Laney, Mary Howard, and Wilj Sturkey. The Openers are Elaine, Hank, Wilj, Stell Simonton, and Andy Weiskoff. If anyone would like to know more about the Membership Guild, participate in setting up a kiddush, opening, or greeting, contact Wilj at [cincodemayo55@comcast.net](mailto:cincodemayo55@comcast.net) or Elaine at [ergale@hotmail.com](mailto:ergale@hotmail.com). ~

### ***Social Justice Guild*** ***By Charlene Ball***

**The Social Justice Guild** will meet on October 4. Lorraine will chair, and Carol will be recorder. The Guild is sponsoring the Book Discussion Group, which is currently reading *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Dr. Joy De Gruye. Members and friends are welcome to attend the discussion group as well as SJG meetings. ~

## ***Guild Month in November***

**November will be Guild Month, and each of our active guilds will make a brief presentation during the COL. On November 1, the Finance Committee and the Fundraising Guild will present; on November 8, the Education and Communication/Newsletter Guilds will present; on November 15, we will hear from the Building and Grounds Guild and the Art Guild; on November 22, we will hear from the Program and Social Justice Guilds; and on November 29, we will hear from the Membership Guild. ~**



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# Social Justice Corner

## ***The Case of Jerry Banks: A Story of Two Unsolved Murders of Whites, the Framing of an Innocent Black Man, and Three Orphans***

***By Linda A. Bell***

**On August 4, I attended a meeting titled "Never Too Late" at the Decatur Library** in which a number of people discussed the "cold cases" on which they had been working with the Cold Case Justice Initiative in the Syracuse School of Law. As I listened, I kept thinking of the case of Jerry Banks.

In 1974, Banks, a poor Black man, was accused of two murders in Henry County, Georgia. Both victims were white: a man, director of the local high school band, and a girl, a band member. Banks was tried two times, the second after his previous attorney was disbarred for incompetence for his performance in a different case. When the Court decided that the incompetent attorney had represented Banks adequately, he remained on death row until he was exonerated in 1980, after two other attorneys uncovered exculpatory evidence previously hidden by the prosecution. That exoneration came too late for Banks: shortly thereafter, unable to convince his wife to change her mind about her pending divorce, he killed her, then himself, leaving a note indicating that everything he had in this world had been taken from him.

***I'm sure I wasn't the only one to think that . . . the legal system was more concerned to protect a possible white perpetrator than to solve the crime, especially when a poor Black man could be framed . . . .***

Many aspects of this case were deeply disturbing. Banks had waited with the bodies he had found while out hunting. The prosecution quickly learned that Banks had indeed flagged down a motorist to call the police and then waited for them. This and other evidence was, however, hidden from his defense. The prosecution chose, rather, to claim that he had viciously murdered the victims, even though tests on his confiscated rifle did not support that the bullets had come from his rifle and several reported hearing shots earlier, when Banks was at work. Having deliberately framed him, the prosecution played a large role in Banks's killing of his wife and himself, a guilt not expiated by the rather paltry amount—\$150,000—paid to the custodians of their three children to settle the \$12 million lawsuit against the former sheriff and five of his deputy sheriffs. The oldest child was 11 at the time.

Never did I see anything about criminal charges and prison terms for those who had framed him. The legal system was confronted with that information twice: once when the evidence was brought to light and Banks was exonerated, and a second time when the children's custodians pursued the lawsuit. Despite the indisputable evidence of egregious wrongdoing, the system apparently chose to do nothing.

Nor, from what I could determine, was anything ever done to find and prosecute the actual murderer. Some at the time speculated that the father of the girl might have killed the two, perhaps suspecting an illicit liaison between them. I'm sure I wasn't the only one to think that even when the victims were white, the legal system was more concerned to protect a possible white perpetrator

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# **Minister's Corner**

by Rev. Marsha Mitchiner

## **Caring Thoughts Go Out To:**

\* **Family and friends of Diana Jones**, former member of First E, who died on September 22 following a long battle with cancer. Diana came to First E as a student at Candler seeking information on non-traditional spiritual groups. and her class report became part of a book written by her professor. She was funny, smart, and caring with a big heart. She will be missed by many across the country who knew her.

\* **Alan Dynin**, friends and family, in the loss of Alan's brother following a brief illness.

\* **Congratulations to Libby Ware** for her upcoming event at Charis Books to sign her first novel, **Lum**.

\* **Many thanks to the wonderful E Band--Jean Heinrich, Andy Weiskoff, Craig Rafuse and Aviva--** for their accompaniment and special music during our Founders Day service. More! We want more! ~

*Our thoughts and prayers go out to the students, faculty, employees, parents, and the entire community of Umpqua Community College in Oregon.*

## ***The Case of Jerry Banks ~ Continued from page 5***

than to solve the crime, especially when a poor Black man could be framed and the authorities could then pretend that they had solved the crime.

This case continues to haunt me. After learning about it, I mentioned it whenever appropriate in my philosophy classes at GSU, hoping thereby to get the students to realize and to question what was being done in our name by the legal system. I couldn't think of much else I could do to help right these wrongs except to make others aware of them.

Later I challenged Michael Bowers, who became Attorney General of Georgia in 1981 and had worked in the Attorney General's office during the time of this lengthy and complex series of injustices. In a talk at GSU, he had proposed fewer appeals and swifter executions of those on death row. In the question-and-answer period afterwards, I noted that without those appeals Jerry Banks, an innocent man, would have been executed. Despite the sizeable audience, my challenge was patronizingly dismissed by Bowers with a complacent shrug and the glib observation that any legal system will make "mistakes." It wasn't clear that he even remembered the case. His indifference to injustice and even to criminal activity, I thought, reflected that of the legal system leading up to and following Banks's exoneration.

This is, of course, only one of many such cases in the legal system that have left me with no respect for it and a determination never again to use "justice" when referring to it. To allow the word to be used to name a system with so little concern for justice is to mask that lack of concern and to perpetrate a gross hypocrisy. That masking is insidious since it provides a cover and supports a complacency that will continue to protect the injustices perpetrated by the legal system. ~

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### *FROM FOUNDERS DAY SERVICE*

*In the beginning there was a man. And the man had a dream. And the man shared the dream with others who were seeking a new way to question and explore their spirituality. They gathered and talked, sang and ate, laughed and cried. Together they created a place of learning and sanctuary and they called it First Existentialist. And it was good. ~*

# Speakers in October

## **Rev. Angela Denise Davis on October 4**

Rev. Angela Denise Davis, who will speak on October 4 on the topic, "When Opportunity Knocks," is a certified rehabilitation counselor and an ordained minister. She is a graduate of Clark Atlanta University and holds a master of divinity degree 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 employment specialist at the Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI), and through the resource of her business, Braille South, a counseling and consultation service. Angela is also an artist and believes in the power of art to help individuals find spiritual and vocational direction. She has been a freelance graphic designer for over fifteen years. She currently sits on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), and serves as vice-president. Angela lives in East Point, Georgia, with her partner, Mary Anne Adams and their canine child, Kasi. ~

## **Dr. Jean Heinrich on October 11**

**Dr. Jean Heinrich, who will speak on October 11 on, "Existentialism Rocks,"** is a psychologist recently returning from working with our troops in Heidelberg, Germany for two years and also a Founding Member of The First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta. She is also a musician/performer and composer/poet. ~

## **Vanessa Jackson on October 18**

**Vanessa Jackson, speaking on October 18 on the topic "Wounding, Healing, and Recovering Meaning: Tools for Transforming Powerlessness into Power,"** is a licensed clinical social worker and owner of Healing Circles, Inc., a personal and professional development consulting practice. Ms. Jackson earned a Masters Degree from Washington University-George Warren Brown School of Social Work. She is the author of *In Our Own Voice: African-American Stories of Oppression, Survival and Recovery in Mental Health Systems* and *Separate and Unequal: The Legacy of Racially Segregated Psychiatric Hospitals*, monographs on the history of African-American psychiatric experiences, "Surviving My Sister's Suicide: A Journey Through Grief" in *Living Beyond Loss: Death in the Family* (Monica McGoldrick and Froma Walsh, eds.), "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul: Feminist Reflections on Therapy with Low-wage Earning Women" in *Psychotherapy with Women: Exploring Diverse Contexts and Identities* (Marsha P. Mirkin, et al, eds.), and "Families of African Origin: An Overview" with L. Black in *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, 3rd edition (Monica McGoldrick, et al, eds.). She is currently working on a book with Elaine Pinderhughes on power in clinical and community settings. Ms. Jackson is a former member of the Georgia Governor's Advisory Council on Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse and former Board Member of the National Leadership Council on African American Behavioral Health. She is a nationally recognized speaker on mental health issues, with a focus on culturally conscious therapy and therapy with marginalized populations. She has developed a concept, "fiscal trauma," which served as the foundation for an economic empowerment recovery program for survivors of domestic violence. Ms. Jackson's passion is supporting activists in creating healthy and balanced lives. She offers an Activists' Assistance Program to provide politically conscious and clinically sound counseling and healing workshops to Atlanta-area feminist non-profit organizations. ~

## **Franklin Abbott on October 25**

**Franklin Abbott, who will speak on October 25 on "Time and Time Again,"** is a psychotherapist in private practice and a poet. He is Chairperson of the Atlanta Queer Literary Festival. ~

*Existentialism is the subjective experience, not some preset essence that determines what a human becomes. - Rev. Marsha Mitchiner*



# **October 2015 Sunday Celebrations of Life**

- October 4**      ***When Opportunity Knocks***  
***Speaker: Rev. Angela Denise Davis***  
***Facilitator: D. Patton White***  
***Accompanist: William "Bill" Chelton***
- October 11**    ***Existentialism Rocks***  
***Speaker: Dr. Jean Heinrich***  
***Facilitator: Dr. Sharon Mathis***  
***Accompanist: Aviva and the Flying Penguins***
- October 18**    ***Wounding, Healing, and Recovering Meaning: Tools for  
Transforming Powerlessness into Power***  
***Speaker: Vanessa Jackson, Soul Doula, Maker of Magic and  
Psychotherapist***  
***Facilitator: Lorraine Fontana***  
***Accompanist: Alan Dynin***
- October 25**    ***Time and Time Again***  
***Speaker: Franklin Abbott***  
***Facilitator: Dr. Saralyn Chesnut***  
***Accompanist: Aviva and The Flying Penguins***

*We are a philosophically-based, spiritual community  
dedicated to human liberation and founded on existentialist and feminist  
principles.*

# The Back Page

Members and Friends Speak Out



## On Reading Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

By *Katrice C. Baker*

Chapter 3 of Dr. Joy DeGruy's book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* is the most gruesome in detail that I and several others I know have witnessed concerning how slaves and POC (people of color) were treated during and after slavery in the U.S. We talk about how the Nazis and Stalinist Soviets mistreated Jews, Gypsies, LGBTQ's and the atrocities committed. Up until recently, very little information was being shared about the atrocities committed by Americans towards their own countryfolk simply due to the color of their skin. I read only once in high school of a slavemaster about to kill one of his slaves because he was elderly and going deaf.

What can we do, all of us, not just the “privileged race,” to remind us instead of guilt-tripping our way through this terrible legacy or “sweep it under the rug” so to speak, to find means to reconcile teaching the truth about history and at the same time move forward in finding solutions to problems relating to our current race relations? ~

*Katrice C. Baker is a member of the Social Justice Guild and the Book Discussion Group.*

*The human race is challenged more than ever before to demonstrate our mastery, not over nature but of ourselves. ~ Rachel Carson*

**The Existentialist** is published monthly. Deadline for the November 2015 newsletter is October 18. Send your articles and announcements to [mcharleneball@yahoo.com](mailto:mcharleneball@yahoo.com). The editor reserves the right to edit or refuse any material submitted.