



DECEMBER NEWSLETTER
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FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

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President's Message

CHRISTINE BERN, *President*

FAW will be ringing in the holidays at our not-to-be-missed December meeting to the lovely choral sounds of the Hermon Baptist Church Senior Choir. Thank you to Shirley Baugher for her persistence in securing the choir, a Chicago legendary choral ensemble. Thank you also to the Reverend Keith Edwards and members of the Senior Choir for sharing your inspiring holiday sounds

The Nominating Committee has begun the process of putting together the slate for next year's FAW Board of Directors. There are nine open Board positions: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Bulletin Editor, Revisions, Yearbook, Juvenile Literary Awards and Literary Awards. If you would like to be a part of the FAW Board, please talk to a Nominating Committee Member: Shirley Baugher, Tammie Bob, or Marion Sherlock. Please consider serving. It is both a privilege and a great opportunity to serve the organization.

I wish you all a very happy holiday season, and I hope to see you on December 10.

DECEMBER PROGRAM

The Hermon Baptist Church Senior Choir

SHIRLEY BAUGHER



Hermon Baptist Church Choir ▲

This December, FAW is privileged to present members of the Senior Choir of Chicago's Hermon Baptist Church. The Biblical Psalm 95 begins, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation." For 125 years, the Senior Choir of the Hermon Baptist Church has been doing just that, inspiring all who hear them.

The Senior Choir was originally composed of thirteen African American men and women, mostly servants of wealthy residents on Chicago's Gold Coast, who came together in 1880 to worship and sing. Having no church or gathering place, they met in various houses on both the north and south sides of Chicago, often traveling great distances to be together. They sang in the basement of the all-white LaSalle Baptist Church for a few years and then moved on to the Bethesda Baptist Church on South Dearborn Street. Like itinerant musicians, they moved from place to place, always raising their voices in praise and thanksgiving—but always in someone else's house. Finally, in 1902, they came to rest at 1754 North Clark Street in Chicago and were able to sing in their own home, the Hermon Baptist Church.

Their inspiring story and their beautiful singing attracted many followers and visitors to the little church on North Clark Street. In 2012, the Mayor of the City of Chicago and members of the City Council paid a well-deserved tribute to the Hermon Baptist Church Senior Choir by offering a resolution and extending hearty congratulations to them on the occasion of their 125th birthday.

It has been said that not to hear this choir sing is to be a little poorer in this life. Members of the FAW will be much richer today.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Luncheon Reservations

Luncheon reservations for the December 10, 2014 meeting of the Friends of American Writers are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 7. Please note that this deadline is firm, and no reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve please call only Lorraine Campione (773-275-5118) or Vivian Mortensen (847-827-8339).

Luncheon will be served at 1:00 p.m. in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Place. Please note the change in time. Members of The Senior Choir of the Hermon Baptist church will perform at 12:00 noon. The cost of the luncheon is \$40, payable by cash or check to FAW, in the front lobby on the day of the luncheon. Discount parking for FAW luncheon guests is available in the lot just west of the Fortnightly at 100 E. Bellevue Place. If you are reserving for a group, we ask that only one person make the group request to avoid confusion. Please note: if you make a reservation and find you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Nominating Committee

Currently, three members have been named to the Nominating Committee. They are: Marion Sherlock, Shirley Baugher, and Tammie Bob. If you would like to serve on this committee, please contact Christine Bern, (cjbern@aol.com)

We would like to add one non-board member and one member-at-large.

The following positions for the FAW Board are open for 2015-17: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Literary Awards Chair, Juvenile Awards Chair, Revisions, and Yearbook. If you would be interested in serving in one of these positions, please contact Shirley (shirleyba@rcn.com), Marion (marion.sherlock@sbcglobal.net) or Tammie (Bobtam410@gmail.com).

Welcome to New Members

Membership Chair Sandie Weiss reports that FAW now has 106 members. She is pleased to announce the addition of one new member in November: Ida Hagman. We welcome our new member and know that she will enjoy her participation in our organization. If you know of people who might be interested in becoming members, please contact Membership Chair Sandie Weiss, (redheadsandie@sbcglobal.net). Please note, this is a corrected address.

Directory Corrections

We have been informed that there are a few errors/omissions in the 2014-15 FAW Directory. We are very sorry for this. As volunteers, we try very hard to get everything right, but sometimes, inadvertently, mistakes are made. Pat is preparing a list of corrections and will have them ready as soon as possible. Please bear with us.

Literary Awards Committee

Tammie Bob, Chair of the Literary Awards Committee, an-

nounced that the committee now has eleven members and that they have received 40 books for award consideration. Tammie, with the approval of the Board, suggested that the group be known hereafter as the Adult Literature Awards Committee. The committee would welcome new readers to evaluate and discuss submissions. If you would like to be a part of this group, please contact Tammie (Bobtam410@gmail.com).

Juvenile Awards Committee

Tanya Klasser, Chair of the Young People's Literature Awards Committee reported that the group had received 24 books for review to date, with at least two more expected in December. The group met in early November to evaluate books. Tanya also recommended changing the name of the committee, suggesting that the group be The Young People's Literature Awards Committee. The Board agreed that the proposed name is a more accurate description of the group and its purpose.



We are climbing Jacob's Ladder
We are climbing Jacob's Ladder
We are climbing Jacob's Ladder
Soldiers of the cross.

I Love to Tell the Story

The story of little church at 1754 N. Clark Street began more than one hundred years ago in the late 1880s. Wealthy people from the Gold Coast who did not have room for their domestic help in their own mansions found rooms for them in the Old Town area. Life was difficult then for the few people of color (or negroes as they were called then) living on the near north side of Chicago. They were isolated in a white, middle-class enclave and were often subjected to racial bigotry. Among other hardships, there were no churches where they could worship. Determined to practice their religion, thirteen domestics joined together in 1887 to form a singing club under the leadership of Mr. Jordan Allen. Calling themselves The Senior Choir, they became the nucleus of what was to become the Hermon Baptist Church.

The Senior Choir met at different houses each Sunday, often traveling to the south side of Chicago to pray and sing. Because they had to walk, or go by horse and buggy, they usually arrived back in Old Town late on Sunday or even early Monday morning, barely making it to work on time. It was exhausting, but their faith was strong, and they were not going to be deterred by geography. Finally the all-white LaSalle Street Baptist Church agreed to let them meet in the church basement after the regular services had been completed.

A Congregation Adrift

Being able to meet at the LaSalle Church solved the problem of distance for The Senior Choir, but the issue of discrimination remained. They were still a segregated group in someone else's church. They wanted to be with other people of their own faith and color. They continued to search for a Baptist congregation where they would be accepted as equals. Their search led them to the Bethesda Baptist Church on South Dearborn Street—again a long commute, but an improvement over their situation at LaSalle. The pastor of Bethesda, the Reverend Jordan Chavis, admitted the thirteen worshipers as members in 1888.

All went well for a while, until, predictably, the hardship of travel took its toll. The group needed a place to worship nearer to their north side homes. Fortune smiled on them when the Reverend J. F. Thomas, pastor of the Olivet Baptist church, and Reverend Jordan Chavis took the thirteen under their wings and organized them into a church of their own, giving them the name Hermon Baptist



▲ Outside Hermon Baptist Church

Church after Mount Hermon, one of the mountains outside Jerusalem.

Hermon Baptist was first housed in the basement of Turner Hall, located on Clark Street just south of Chicago Avenue. When Turner Hall was torn down to make way for the Chestnut Street Post Office, the parishioners moved to a building on the corner of Franklin and West Whiting Streets (now West Walton). They remained at this location until 1897 when they made their way to 1754 North Clark.

Prior to 1875, the land and building at 1754 had been owned by the Paulse family. They deeded the land to the Chicago Society of the New Jerusalem. In 1895, Mr. and Mrs. William M. Le Moyer donated an additional ten feet and the parkway property to the line on Clark Street. Sister Lucy Everage made a down payment on the building in 1897. Dr. Manning, a white trustee of the Baptist Association, became a member of the Hermon Baptist Trustee Board and worked tirelessly on behalf of the congregation. Dr. Manning's support was critical because, at that time, blacks could not own property in Chicago. With Dr. Manning on the Board of Trustees, the sale and ownership of the site were finalized. On May 1, 1902, the Trustees of the Chicago Society of the New Jerusalem deeded the land and property at 1754 N. Clark Street to the Hermon Baptist Church. The travelers were no longer adrift. At long last, they had found a home.

Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah.

Michael row the boat ashore, hallelujah.

The Church Today

The Hermon Baptist Church has undergone many changes since 1902. In 1925, the church was enlarged to accommodate the growing congregation. Through

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the years, they were able to reduce the church's indebtedness until on Sunday, October 22, 1944, the mortgage was completely paid off and the mortgage paper was burned in a formal ceremony.

From 1944 to the present, Hermon's pastors have spread the message of the little church. The Reverend Dr. William Wadlington (1942-1959) was invited to preach at the World Baptist Alliance in Copenhagen, Denmark and at many churches in western Europe. The Reverend George J. Comier (1961-1981) and his congregation saved the church from real estate developers who wanted to buy the property and move the church to another location. The congregation said no and provided bus transportation for many members who had left the neighborhood and moved different parts of the city in order to keep them at Hermon. Reverend Comier also encouraged musicals, Easter, and Christmas festivals, and youth training to attract young people to the church. He was able to bring in so many new members that his successor, the Reverend Matthew V. Johnson, initiated a new building fund of \$50,000 to once again enlarge and improve the building. Unfortunately, Reverend Johnson relocated before he could realize his goal. Not only did the new pastor, the Reverend Alvin J. Wesley, complete the job, he added a ladies lounge, central air conditioning, saw to the recovering of the pews and refurbished the kitchen. Up-to-date copiers and computers were purchased, along with a new van to transport members to and from Sunday services. A lift was added to take those unable to climb stairs into the sanctuary, and a new intercom system was installed to assure constant communication between the pastor and his staff. When Pastor Wesley retired, Reverend Keith Edwards came in to lead the Hermon faithful through the 21st century. Through it all, the Senior Choir continued to send its glorious sounds throughout the sanctuary.

On October 27, 2013, the Hermon Baptist Church celebrated its 125th anniversary. To commemorate the occasion, the Illinois House of Representatives passed a resolution congratulating the church and recognizing its mission of "...serving, assembling, encouraging, and providing spiritual growth to its membership and to the community at large under its current leader the Reverend Keith L. Edwards."

Touring the Hermon Baptist Church

If you have never been inside the Hermon Baptist Church, here is a little tour. Entering the building from Clark Street, a visitor sees the magnifi-

cent windows on the front façade: three enormous multi-paned sections through which light floods the interior. A small stairway leads from the front foyer to the sanctuary on the second level. The first impression one gets of the main part of the church is its beautiful simplicity. Overhead is a multi-colored stained glass skylight. Dark oak beams from the walls and ceiling. A deep red carpet leads to the pulpit, behind which are the choir lofts. The oak pews are covered with red plush and lead back from the pulpit to the entry at a slight elevation. Dominating the entire room is a large, lighted cross above the choir loft with the message: *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.*


The Hermon Baptist Church, interior

Today, Hermon Baptist is led by the Reverend Keith Edwards, a deeply religious Renaissance man. He was baptized into the Southwestern Baptist Church in 1975. A few years later, he attended the Winston Salem State University and received his Bachelor's degree in Organizational Management from Concordia University in River Forest Illinois. After graduation, he became an administrator with the Institute of Real Estate Management where he served more than 15 years.

But Reverend Edwards is more than an administrator. He is a gifted musician who used his talent to secure positions in several religious institutions: Chief Musician for the Southwestern Baptist Church, Chief Musician for the State Choir of the National Baptist Progressive Convention, and Music Coordinator at the St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, and Minister of Music for the Hermon Baptist Church. He took gospel music to the Women's Division of the Cook County and to the Chicago Public Schools, where he now teaches music. His musical prowess was recognized outside the United States as well when he received a recording contract with Island Records in the UK.

At the core of all his talents is his faith. He was drawn to religious leadership in 2004 and became an ordained minister in 2006, taking over the pulpit at Hermon Baptist when Reverend Alvin Wesley retired. In addition to his teaching and pastoral duties at Hermon Baptist, Reverend Edwards ministers to the residents of the Lincoln Park Nursing Home on a regular basis. And...he is pursuing a Masters Degree in Divinity at the Northern Theological Baptist Seminary.

They say behind every good man is a good woman. Behind Keith Edwards is his lovely wife Rose-

mary, whom he married in 1993. Rosemary has been his friend, his helpmate and his strong supporter throughout his entire career. Theirs is truly a match made in heaven. 



RIGHT The Reverend Keith Edwards, Pastor, Hermon Baptist Church



FAR RIGHT Herman Baptist Church interior

The Reading Corner

The Meaning of Human Existence

Edward O. Wilson

Reviewed by NORMAN BAUGHER

A brief biography of E. O. Wilson provides a good introduction to this jewel of a book—an amazing compilation of an enormous amount of fact and theory that he has woven together in an enjoyable, non-threatening, seamless narrative. To do this with such clarity in so few pages is possible only for a person of maturity and a rich lifetime of study, research, learning, and experience, deep and broad. His many awards that include two Pulitzers and a hundred other awards attest to his intellect and integrity.

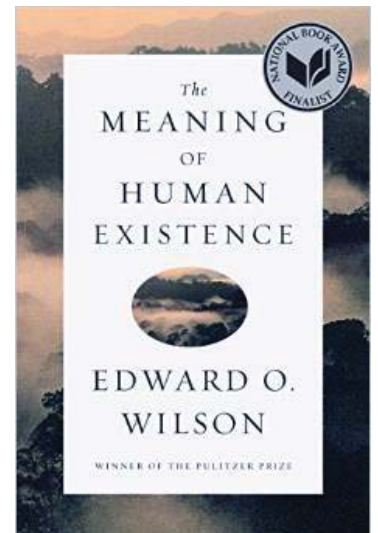
During his childhood he was interested in ornithological fieldwork, but an early loss of depth perception and partial deafness kept him from pursuing this interest. Fortunately for the world, his afflictions could not keep him from serious biological study, and he turned to insects—ants in particular. By 1955, when he was but 26 years, old he completed an exhaustive taxonomic analysis of the

ant genus *Lasius*. This was just the beginning of his work on speciation and touched off his personal theoretical evolution. By 1975 he posited that the biological principles animal societies are based on also apply to humans. This raised the hackles of prominent researchers and scholars in many disciplines. This did not keep him from publishing thoughts counter to other scientists' views. He wrote that evolution is essentially progressive, in contrast to Stephen Jay Gould, and that even altruism may have evolved through natural selection. Wilson never stops rethinking evolution. In 2012 he argued that evolution occurred at the level of the group while his detractors, including Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker argued that a group of organisms was not a unit of selection and that altruistic social behavior was adequately explained by kin selection.

His books, right up to the present volume, provide proof ageism should be resisted and that people well into their eighth decade are quite able to remain creative. His continuing high level of thinking and love of a productive life gives me hope. The jacket copy calls this book “his most philosophical work to date”. His brilliance has shown in every decade since he began his research and studies. He is

the creator of two scientific disciplines, three unifying concepts for science and the humanities jointly, and one major technological advance in the study of global biodiversity.

The opening line of *The Meaning of Human Existence* is, “Does humanity have a special place in the Universe?” In the course of 15 chapters Wilson graciously guides you to the answer capsulized by the last chapter’s title “Alone and Free in the Universe”. For me, clearly a non-scientist, science writing can be a long slog through great detail in the body of the text and at the end discover that everything I am most interested in is contained in the preface and conclusion. The body copy in such books is detailed explication with subtle differences that seems repetitive to the uninitiated and certainly goes beyond my interest. That’s more work than it’s worth for someone like me who



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has interest in the subject but who doesn't intend to make a study of it.

Contrary to some fat science tomes I've labored through, *The Meaning of Human Existence* is short, to the point, and fascinating from beginning to end. This book, then, is a joy. Succinct and informative it is not too long, not too short, but just right. For someone who is somewhat familiar with biology, evolution, and with some understanding of these disciplines on humans and human belief systems this is a compact compendium and a handy tool to refresh one's memory. Wilson's selection of details highlights the magnificent diversity of our planet: 273,000 known species of plants, the number of all known of all organisms is about 2 million but estimated to be at least 3 times that. About 20,000 new species are described annually. There's much more. For anyone who is a stranger to this area of thought it is an exciting introduction. The one lengthy technical argument

is relegated to an appendix. This is an analysis of the theory of inclusive fitness (with the math and references deleted) that he reasons should be replaced by data-based population genetics. Since he touches sufficiently on this debate in the text, this is not essential to understand the book, but it's there for anyone who wants to pursue the issue further, and it provides a hint of his more academic thinking and writing.

As you might suspect from the title of the book, Wilson places high value on the humanities. This is made explicit in Chapter 5, "The All-Importance of the Humanities". Here he makes a point of bringing the humanities and science together, especially biology and its natural concomitant, evolution. It is here that he turns from the biological evolution of humans to the development of culture and social evolution. In this chapter he notes that scientific discovery and technology in time becomes extremely complex, requires

more and greater devices and larger teams to make new discoveries and that the number of discoveries per researcher per year has declined. He claims, "What will continue to evolve and diversify almost infinitely are the humanities".

The book is so tightly constructed and so jam packed with ideas and data that I can only hint at its content and encourage you to read the real thing for yourself.

A warning to the devoutly religious: for Wilson, the belief in a "supernatural design, to whose author we owe obeisance . . . has grown less supportable as knowledge of the real world has expanded". He fully understands the human attachment to mystic belief and explains, ". . . it is reasonable to conclude that our loving devotion to it has been hardwired by evolution in the human brain" and a full chapter is given to humans' evolutionary biology to explain the human yearning for a being greater than the self. 