GIVING SOMETHING BACK

Larry's Story
featured on page 7
Mission Statement

Back Bay Mission, a community ministry of the United Church of Christ, serves the Mississippi Gulf Coast and the wider church community by faithful witness for social justice and compassionate service to the poor and marginalized.

Vision Statement

Back Bay Mission shall embody with integrity and truth the prophetic mandate of Micah: “…to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

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Chuck is 41 years old. He is a military veteran. And when we first met him at Back Bay Mission, he had already been homeless six months. He’d heard that Back Bay Mission was a good place that would help, so eventually he started showing up in our Micah Day Center to get a shower and some clean clothes and to enjoy the safe and welcoming environment he found there. Living “under the bushes” was a grueling experience for him. He complained of getting mugged countless times, and the stress of being homeless began to wear profoundly on his body and spirit.

On a crisp day in January, Chuck came into our services building desperate to talk with Jill, one of our caseworkers. “Miss Jill,” he pleaded, “I can’t take this anymore. Please call the police, do something, or I’m just going to kill myself.” Jill called the police and then worked with them and the local V.A. to get Chuck placed in the V.A. hospital for observation. One week later, Chuck was released, and the first place he came to was Back Bay Mission. That very same day, Jill found him housing and provided the financial assistance necessary to pay the deposit. That night, Chuck had a roof over his head and a safe place to sleep for the first time in months.

Chuck’s story is not over, of course. Though his disability benefits provide some financial support to him each month, his problems are legion, and at times Chuck seems his own worst enemy. His path to stability, good health, and economic security will not be a direct one, but rather one fraught with steep hills, low valleys, and desperate detours.

That’s how it is for most of those we serve. While some who seek assistance at Back Bay Mission are in a temporary time of need caused by sudden unemployment or unexpected health crises, others are entrenched in poverty or have other chronic issues they’ve long ignored. There is rarely an easy way forward or a direct and unfettered path to better lives.

This year Back Bay Mission celebrates our 90th anniversary. As I read back over our history and witness our ministries today, it’s clear to me that Back Bay Mission has always been a place and a ministry that is about accompanying people in need on their own unique journeys of transformation, healing, and justice. It was true 90 years ago when poor fisherfolk needed someone to see their plight clearly and lend a loving hand; it is true today for people like Chuck and the thousands of others we serve each and every year.

Please join us in this anniversary year to celebrate 90 years of extraordinary ministry and prophetic witness on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Consider specific ways that you can engage in and support this historic ministry now to ensure our ministry for the future. Together, let’s strike out on a determined path forward, so that those who need us may find their own journey eased.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Shari Prestemon, Executive Director

Is Back Bay Mission in your will?

To let us know of your planned gift or to consider making one, contact Executive Director Shari Prestemon, spresteremon@thebackbaymission.org or 228-432-0301 ext. 303.
In the 1920s Biloxi was an important center for the growing seafood canning industry. The poor pay and demanding hours created communities of workers living in poverty and poor health. A small, struggling, mission congregation of the Evangelical Synod found these seafood workers a challenge to their faith that called them to feed the hungry and heal the sick. In the early 1920s, a new pastor and a committed member of the congregation decided to reach beyond their own walls and concerns to help these folks in need. Pastor George M. L. Hoffman and Louise Andre McDonnell visited the worker camps and found there a family with children who needed the church’s attention. Ms. McDonnell began driving to the Back Bay each Sunday morning to bring the children to the church on the front beach. Soon there were dozens of children coming and the church purchased a truck to bring them to Sunday school. The families wanted to share in worship, but were uncomfortable in the church, so two chapels were organized on the Back Bay. To meet the health needs, a clinic was opened and Deaconess Sister Frieda Muentermann came from St. Louis to serve as nurse to the seafood families.

Faith and dedication led a small mission congregation to reach out to help others. The wider church seeing the work that was being done supported the Biloxi congregation financially and with clothes and food to help the needy seafood workers. So began what is today the Back Bay Mission that still reaches out to help the needy of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast.

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Celebrating 90 Years

90th Anniversary: 9 Ways to Get Involved!

1) $90,000 and 10 Shrimp Boils: We are seeking 10 congregations across the country who will pledge to raise $9,000 each during the coming year for Back Bay Mission. You plan a shrimp boil to help raise the money and we'll send staff members to join you for the party!

2) $90 per month for 12 months: How about making a monthly gift of $90 to Back Bay Mission for the next twelve months ($1,080 total)? You can set up a recurring gift using our on-line donation process.

3) Back Bay Mission Sunday: Schedule a BBM Sunday on your church calendar. Invite a former workcamp volunteer to share the message about their experience at BBM. Or call BBM to see if there might be a Board member or someone else in your area who could share the special day with you. Take a special offering to support BBM ministries.

4) Write an article: Write an article for your church newsletter highlighting the work of Back Bay Mission and your church's relationship to our ministry. Send us a copy!

5) Become our Facebook Friend: (the page with our logo is the official BBM FB page). Share photos or videos on our page of your experiences at BBM or of a fund-raiser you did to support the Mission. Post comments about why you love BBM.

6) Host a reunion: Invite former workcamp volunteers for a fun reunion to share stories, pictures, and laughs.

7) Make a planned gift: Consider naming BBM in your will, or maybe a gift annuity. Help prosper the ministries of BBM for another 90 years!

8) Talk to your Mission/Outreach Committee: Does your congregation make an annual gift to BBM from its mission budget? Start a conversation!

9) Pray for us. And pray too for those we serve and those who serve.
24-year-old Ryan King has travelled to BBM seven times since 2005 to participate in the workcamping program. He is a member of First Church of Christ (UCC) in Glastonbury, Connecticut and is currently obtaining his Masters Degree in Environmental Education. He shares the following testimonial about how his service with Back Bay Mission has changed him and directs his faith.

While I strive to align my lifestyle with the principles of Christianity, it is inevitable that I will slip up every now and then. Whether in the form of residual frustration from long hours studying in the library or keeping up with a burgeoning to-do list, the Christian values seem to evaporate under the heat of self-interest. Nevertheless, I am a firm believer that faith is a verb, and the manifestation of Christian values through service reveals a deeper meaning of what it means to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly”. Nothing illustrates this more for me than the work of Back Bay Mission.

In the spring of 2005, as a senior in high school, I embarked on a mission trip with my hometown church to Biloxi. College applications had been submitted, summer was approaching, and I was poised for the new happenings ahead. Yet while everything in my life seemed to be falling into place, I was anxious and worried, bogged down by uncertainty of things to come. Then I met Mae Jennings. On the last day [of the mission trip], after installing a handicapped access ramp at her house, my walk back to the dormitory was interrupted by a calm breeze. I turned to see Mae sitting on her porch, an angelic silhouette, glasses glowing with the sunset reflections off the Gulf. She asked me to join her on the porch. Her welcoming smile roped me towards her, and I was met by the warm embrace of a hug that will never be duplicated again for the rest of my life. As I got up to leave, Mae whispered in my ear “Just remember, my son: If it is meant to be, it is up to me”.

Since then, I have returned to Back Bay Mission six times following Hurricane Katrina. In that time, I have witnessed an entire community unite hand-in-hand in bettering the lives of so many. I am extremely grateful to be part of a church filled with compassionate and good Christians, taking time away from their lives to serve those in need. Personally, my faith is restored when I revisit Back Bay Mission. Every nail is a piece of my heart. Every person is my family. Every memory is my story. Their story. Our story. Mae’s story. If it is meant to be, it is up to me. My faith is my compass, and I am blessed that, for me, true north is, and always will be, Back Bay Mission.
Sitting at the kitchen table of Back Bay Mission’s services building, he seems a man at peace with his life now, grateful for every day God gives him because he knows just how bad it can get. He has a hearing aid in one ear, two steel rods in his back, and a mouth only half full of teeth. His name is Larry, and he has seen some very tough times.

Four years after losing his wife of 26 years, Larry was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis back in 1999. The years following were a roller coaster of health crises, some so debilitating that he required around-the-clock care in a nursing facility. His doctor told him warmer climates would be better for him, and his children and grandchildren lived down South, so south he headed, making his way with a caretaker from North Dakota to Florida. His car held everything he owned and every dollar he had was with him, all he needed to start a new life. But a quick stop for a meal at a Waffle House in D’Iberville, Mississippi in October 2011 changed everything. Larry went to the restroom, and when he returned his caretaker had stolen his money, the car, and everything in it. Larry had just been made homeless and completely destitute.

He slept wherever he could find a spot, and then heard about Back Bay Mission. He became a regular guest at the Mission’s Day Center, where staff quickly developed relationships with this gentle soul and worked with him to build a new beginning. In January, Larry found a trailer to rent and moved in with Back Bay Mission’s assistance.

Today Larry remains housed and is no longer homeless, but he still comes to the Mission five days a week. He’s not a client anymore, though; now he’s a volunteer. The food pantry that Larry helps organize daily has never looked so good, and the Day Center where Larry first discovered the Mission is another place he helps out. “I just enjoy doing this, and I do it from my heart,” he says. “When I get up in the morning, my goal is just to help somebody. I had never been homeless before in my life. And the way Back Bay Mission helped me...well, I’d never be able to pay [the Mission] back for what you did for me.”

When he reflects on his experience of homelessness, he grows quiet for a moment, remembering those awful months. “Being homeless and living through what I did…. Homelessness is not a place to be, especially people with medical problems like mine. It’s really heartbreaking, because in so many places if they know you’re homeless they kind of shy away from you and expect you to do something wrong.” But he says he found a different kind of place in Back Bay Mission. “The people that work here are very respectful and go out of their way to help people. It flatters me every day to see the way the staff respect others as human beings. They don’t look down on people just because they’re homeless or hungry.”

Larry says he’s grateful for every day he wakes up and has another day to live, seeing each day as a gift from God above. He’s a firm believer than in order to receive something, you’ve got to give something. So in addition to his volunteer work at Back Bay Mission he helps other homeless people find jobs in the community and get their lives back on track.

As our interview drew to a close, Larry gets quiet again and looks down at the table. When he raises his face, a tear slips down his cheek and his voice quivers: “Thank y’all for allowing me to work here. Because I’ve been there [homeless], and I don’t want to be there ever again.”
HONOR GIFTS

April Alliston in honor of Ms. Evelyn Rockwell
Rev. & Mrs. Jim & Anita Allenbum in honor of Henry Molozay
Mr. & Mrs. A. Michael & Linda Schaller
Mr. & Mrs. John & Lois Boyer in honor of their son and their families
Ms. Judy Cookson in honor of Dr. John Pecoul
Dr. James Cambria in honor of Susan Cambria
Bill & Mary Anne Tyson in honor of Lois & John Boyer
Mr. & Mrs. Jack & Linda Brudnicki
Mr. & Mrs. Charles & Betty Bultman
Mrs. Kathleen & Jack Burkholder in honor of your nieces & nephews at Christmas
Mr. & Mrs. Dick & Nancy Schultz in honor of John & Ellen Pecoul
Mr. & Mrs. Lois & Larry Catlett in honor of all BBM clients, First Congregational Church, Pecatonica, Illinois
Mr. & Mrs. Jack & Nancy Vold in honor of Dorothy McEwen & Lucimarian Robert
Mr. & Mrs. James & Nancy Vold in honor of Tom & Marty Perl
Mr. & Mrs. David & Joyce Vondra in honor of Aaron and Patrick Bertsch
Mr. & Mrs. Robert & Susan Vondra in honor of Richard Small
Mr. & Mrs. Terry & Olivia White in honor of Richard & Peggy Feyen
A. Beverly Brindle in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Bob Lehman
Mr. & Mrs. George & Phyllis Smith in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Bob Klages, Ruth Bloom, Bill Blomberg, Clarice Hutmacher, Karen Buss, Bonnie Zettle, Herb Currier, Cindy Earnest, Werkheiser, Marcella Fouke, Gene Lestikow, Andy & Mrs. Hazel Dorsey
Mr. & Mrs. George & Phyllis Smith in honor of all the volunteers at Back Bay Mission
Mr. & Mrs. Dick & Nancy Schultz in honor of Bill & Bonnie Falla
Mr. & Mrs. George & Phyllis Smith in honor of all of the volunteers at the Befriender meeting
Mr. & Mrs. Dick & Nancy Schultz in honor of William & Drue Vodra and Richard & Jane Vodra
Mr. & Mrs. George & Phyllis Smith in honor of all of the volunteers at the Befriender meeting
Mr. & Mrs. George & Phyllis Smith in honor of Judith A. Barrows, Sharon & Joey Johnson
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Mr. & Mrs. George & Phylli
MEMORIAL GIFTS

Rev. & Mrs. Tom & Sandy Dipko
memory of Carl & Cindy Dick

Mrs. Marian Dawson
memory of Ms. Cora McWilliam

Rev. & Mrs. Terry & Olivia White
in memory of Ellen Sayer Hinson

Mr. & Mrs. Marcus & Jane Buehrer
memory of Roger Perl

Ms. Edith Campbell
memory of "Sparky" Sonderegger

Mr. & Mrs. Denny & Lois Householder
memory of Roger Perl, memory of Rev. William Homeister

Mrs. Shirley Adams
memory of Grace Raffield

Rev. & Mrs. John & Ellen Pecoul
memory of Ordell Bjerke

Rev. & Mrs. Robert & Evelyn Baur
memory of Emily Shepard

Ms. Abigail Young
memory of Marcella Hendricks

Rev. & Mrs. Gail & Carol Royster
memory of Roger Perl

Ms. Carolyn Barszcz
memory of Roger Perl

Ms. Fran Apltauer
memory of Roger Perl

Rev. & Mrs. Ken & Beverly Appley
memory of Roger Perl

Rev. Dr. & Mrs. William & Giulio Rosier
memory of Roger Perl

Rev. & Mrs. Roger & Rogene Leberak
memory of Anita Rezash, memory of Rev. William Homeister

Ms. Denise Heinbuch
memory of Rev. Henry F. Heinbuch

Rev. & Mrs. John & Ellen Pecoul
memory of Ordell Bjerke

Rev. & Mrs. Ruth & Roger Perl
memory of Deloit Rigler, memory of Roger Perl, memory of Dorothy Fey, memory of Irenus Baumler, memory of Ruth Morehouse, memory of Roger Bacon

Rev. & Mrs. Denny & Lois Householder
memory of Roger Perl

Rev. & Mrs. Denny & Lois Householder
memory of Roger Perl

Mr. & Mrs. Terry & Olivia White
memory of Ellen Sayer Hinson

Mr. & Mrs. Christopher Dahl & Mrs. Ruth Rewse
memory of Neil Dall

Rev. & Mrs. sisters & ihre Freundin
memory of John Albertson

Mr. & Mrs. John & Ellen Pecoul
memory of Ordell Bjerke

Rev. & Mrs. John & Ellen Pecoul
memory of Ordell Bjerke

Ms. Abigail Young
memory of Marcella Hendricks

Rev. & Mrs. John & Ellen Pecoul
memory of Ordell Bjerke

Ms. Abigail Young
memory of Marcella Hendricks

Rev. & Mrs. John & Ellen Pecoul
memory of Ordell Bjerke
VOLUNTEER GROUPS THAT SERVED
October 2011 – February 2012

Memorial UCC - Fitchburg, WI
First Congregational UCC - St. Charles, IL
St. Matthew UCC - Wheaton, IL
First Congregational UCC - Appleton, WI
St. John’s Christian Church - Archbold, OH
Orange Congregational UCC - Orange, CT
First Congregational UCC - Wisconsin Rapids, WI
First Congregational UCC - Battle Creek, MI
St. John UCC - Kankakee, IL
Pilgrim UCC - Houston, TX
Pleasantville UCC - Chalfont, PA
First Congregational UCC - Mt. Vernon, OH

Edwards Congregational UCC - Davenport, IA
First Church of Christ (UCC) - Glastonbury, CT
Palm Schwendkerfelder Church - Palm, PA
Pilgrim UCC - Duxbury, MA
South Church UCC - Kennebunkport, ME
First Congregational UCC - LaGrange, IL
Open Prairie UCC - Princeton, IL
Newtown Congregational Church - Newtown, CT
St. John’s UCC - Mokena, IL
Granville & Zion UCC - Granville, IL
First Church (UCC) - Windsor, CT
Pleasant Run UCC - Indianapolis, IN

Although several churches may have collaborated in a service trip, only the name of the church that organized the group is listed.

Thanks to all for such generous service to the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community!

Volunteer Group from Heidelberg University in Tiffin, OH with Executive Director Shari Prestemon and friends of the Mission Rudy and Betty Roggenkamp (CT) in March 2012.
Celebrating 90 Years of Transformative Ministry

Back Bay Mission
1012 Division St.
Biloxi, MS 39530