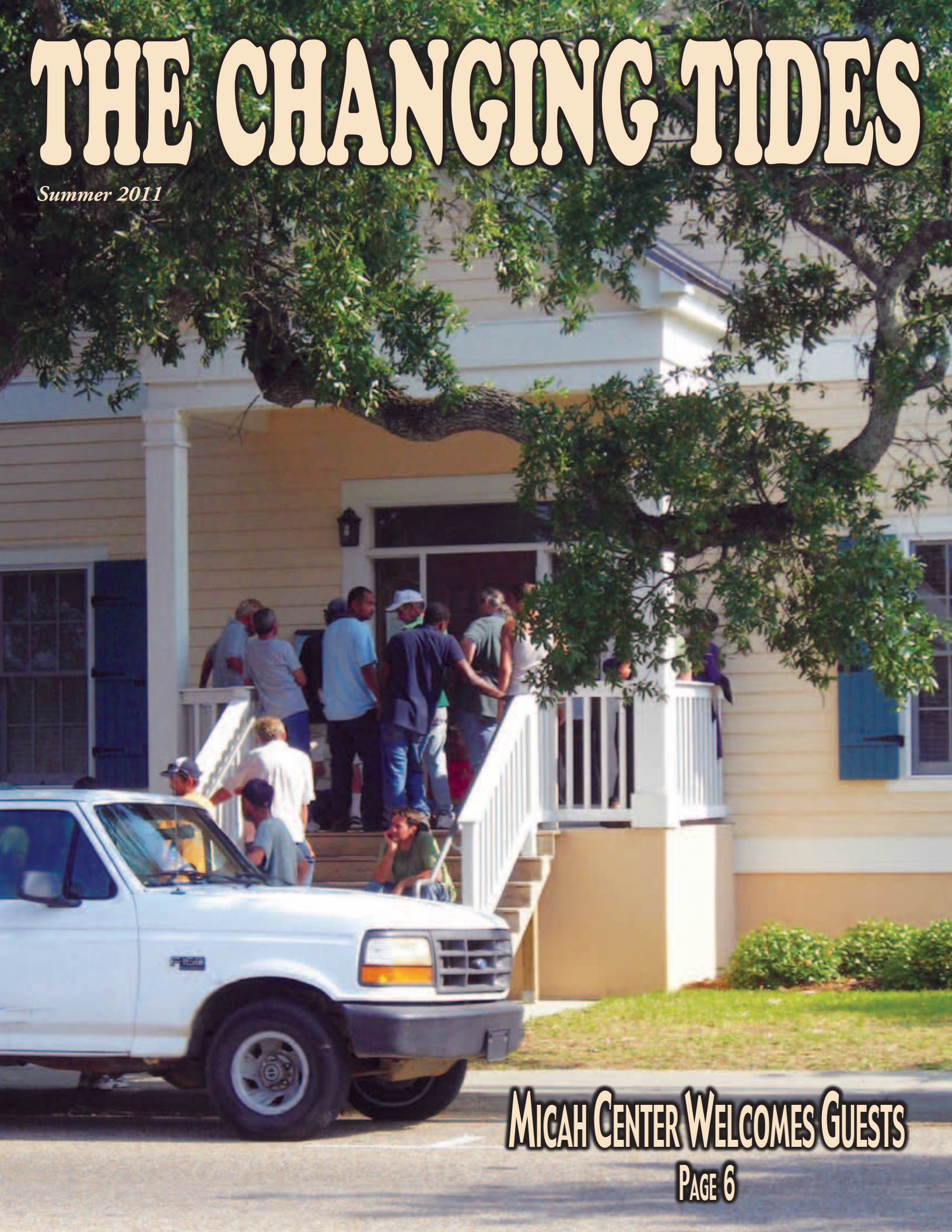


THE CHANGING TIDES

Summer 2011



MICAH CENTER WELCOMES GUESTS

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Back Bay Mission • Biloxi, Mississippi

A Community Ministry of the United Church of Christ

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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.”

C O N T E N T S

Summer 2011

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A Message from the Executive Director...

"All in the Family"

*S*cotty was a regular visitor, a client who often came by as he did one day recently just to “shoot the breeze” or share a laugh. On this visit, he wasn’t looking for any particular help or assistance, but I think he received something else he sorely needed... As I watched our staff members interact with him -- calling him by name, joking with him, welcoming him in -- it struck me that they treated him like a member of the family. And I would guess that it is that kind of hospitality and embrace that brings him to our doors again and again.

Yesterday I spoke with a housing recovery volunteer in for the week with a group from New England. She was updating me on another volunteer from the church, a woman who had been to Back Bay Mission several times but who was now struggling with a difficult illness and was unable to make this trip. Over time, she had become special to many of us here at Back Bay Mission, and it was clear that we had also become dear to her. Somewhere over the course of all the years and project sites and evenings at the Mission, we had become honorary members of each other’s families. And the concern we shared for each other was genuine and deep.

Then there was the gentleman I spoke to one day in our Micah Center, a frequent “guest” of our day center program where homeless individuals can catch a quick shower, get a clean supply of clothing or access a number of other services designed to stabilize their lives. As we sat together that day talking about his life on the streets over the last two years, he said of the Mission: “This place gives me a sense of home even though I’m homeless. It’s a safe place to come, where you welcome us in. You don’t know how important that is.”

I could tell countless other stories about the many ways this ministry transforms strangers into “family,” ways that Back Bay Mission has come to feel like “home” for so many. Whether clients, staff, Board members, volunteers or donors, something happens here that moves us and changes us, that transcends our differences and draws us together. Maybe it’s a certain kind of welcome, or an attitude of joy and



acceptance and love. Or maybe it’s the Holy Spirit at work, binding us together as only it can do. Whatever it is, I am grateful. Thank you... for being part of Back Bay Mission’s special extended family.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shari Prestemon".

Rev. Shari Prestemon, Executive Director

A humble request...

Back Bay Mission appreciates your thoughtfulness in donating clothing for possible use by the homeless guests it hosts in the Micah Day Center. However, we cannot accept items other than underwear and socks because we lack sufficient storage space.

So...if you’re in a volunteer group that’s coming to Back Bay Mission, please do not bring clothing with you. We know you understand.

Thank you!

TRUE LOVE

*By Matt Cole
Back Bay Mission Volunteer*

I love Biloxi. I'm from Connecticut, but Biloxi is the place that I call my second home, with intentions of making it my main home after I finish with a graduate degree in social work. It's hard for me to describe just how much Biloxi means to me in words, but I'll give it my best shot.

I'd never heard of Back Bay Mission or Biloxi before 2007. Just as I don't know most of the towns and cities along the New England coast, I only know a handful of places along the Gulf Coast. I knew nothing about all the wonderful people and lifestyles that make up this magnificent place.

During my first trip down in January 2008, I discovered what "Southern hospitality" really is. While working on the house of a man named Willie, one of his neighbors was walking by and offered us pralines. I'll be the first to admit that this struck me as odd, mainly because I had no idea what pralines were. Secondly, in New England, no one walks down the street and offers pralines to total strangers. That sort of behavior is what causes kids to yell out "stranger danger."

Then I got to thinking about what she had done for us. She had made a homemade snack for volunteers from another part of the country to say, "Thank you for your help." It lifts the spirit, thinking about that kind gesture. Even now, more than three years after that moment, it still brings a smile to my face.

In that gesture, I saw what it really means to be a Christian. We go out and help people with our actions. I know that there have been times in the past when I needed help from others, and there will be many more times in the future. I've found that the best way for me to help myself is to help others.

Back Bay Mission facilitates that better than almost anywhere else I have ever been. The staff is amazing, the work is rewarding and the people that I meet going to the Baptist churches in town are simply wonderful.

Life is not all smooth sailing. There are maritime analogies coming up, I must warn you. Sometimes we're in the doldrums, where life is unmoving and things feel depressing. Other times, we're in the Roaring Forties, when we can't stop life from rushing by us. There are also the times when we are scared and are in life's metaphorical Gulf of Aden, when we're afraid that bad things will happen and danger lurks on all sides. Yet we can remember that the Lord is with us, and He will keep us safe, always.

God Bless.

Matt Cole most recently volunteered at Back Bay Mission March 20-26, 2011.



TWINS TRAVEL

F

rom the far Northwest to the coastal Southeast, these two crisscrossed the United States for a year, volunteering at UCC mission sites and filming their progress for a final presentation at the church's General Synod in Tampa, Florida, June 30-July 6.

Richard and Maxwell Brooke landed at Back Bay Mission (in their car) on May 1 and spent the month finding a niche for volunteer work wherever they could. It wasn't hard for the twins (obviously fraternal – they don't look a thing alike) to stay busy in Biloxi.

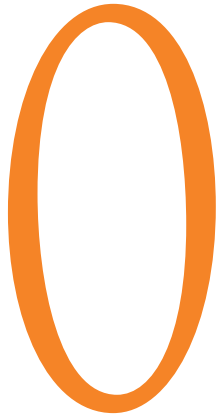
They hail from China Grove, North Carolina, where they attend Mt. Zion UCC and are Partners in Service volunteers. They have created the online Brooke Brothers' Blogging Tour (UCC Volunteer Ministries).

Richard graduated with honors from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, earning a BA in political science and religious studies (minoring in social and economic justice), and Max finished at East Carolina University with a BS in communications.

From Back Bay Mission, they headed to New Orleans where they planned to work with the UCC Disaster Recovery Center before diving into the editing phase, which will bring their adventure to a close.

Their website, www.twinmaps.com, says it all. Loaded with photos, video and a newsy blog, the site takes you along on the trip – and what a ride it has been!





One lives under a bridge. The other pitches his tent in a camp near the VA hospital in Biloxi. Both are fathers who keep in touch with their grown children but won't tell them they're homeless. Each one is bent on finding a job, but both need transportation to and from work. They hang together and visit Back Bay Mission's Micah Day Center for the Homeless pretty regularly, which is where *The Changing Tides* caught up with them.

Phillip moved to the Coast from Georgia in 1997 after his wife died of cancer a year earlier. He had family in Alabama and moved here to be closer to them. From 1998-2004, he was a construction worker and rented one of the company's houses in Hurley, but when he lost that job, he lost the house. When he tried to get work at one of the casinos, he was told hiring had been "on hold" for two years. Another try for a job on a clean-up crew also came up empty.

"I'll do anything," he says. "Yard work, whatever..."

Fred, from Carolina Beach, North Carolina, has been on the Gulf Coast since last December and has been coming to the Micah Center a couple of times a week since shortly after he got here. He heard about it, he says, "through the grapevine."

"When you're homeless and on the street, it doesn't take long."

Fred had been in Oklahoma City and set out for the Gulf Coast looking for work. He had gotten as far as Shreveport, Louisiana, when his car started leaking oil. He sold it for what he could get and caught a Greyhound south for a job he thought he had. When he got here, he discovered he wasn't needed.

"I was, basically, stuck," he says. An offer for a job setting up mobile homes was withdrawn because he didn't have transportation to U.S. 49 where the company is located.

He's been collecting aluminum cans to sell for enough money to place an ad in "The Penny Pincher," seeking a donated car that he can fix up and drive to work. "If I can get a car, I can get a job," he says. "Vehicle equals work." He got a \$5 used bicycle, which he rides to the Micah Center. "It's not a Harley-Davidson," he says, "but it works." Without it, he'd have a 45-minute walk from his camp to Division Street; riding the bike cuts 30 minutes off the trip.

Phillip has been working with Back Bay Mission's Home at Last caseworker, Roxanne Watts, toward getting housed in an apartment. He needs two more documents before his application will be complete, he says.

Fred has been focused entirely on finding reliable transportation so he can get a job and then housing.

They've both found the Micah Center helpful for obtaining food, snacks, taking showers and having laundry done, as well as other services it provides such as helping guests get food stamps.

While looking for work himself, Fred also tries to help others who're homeless and need jobs, and he keeps his sense of humor.



WELCOMES GUESTS *By Maria Watson*



Fred & Phillip

“I don’t think of myself as ‘broke,’” he says, “just ‘financially embarrassed.’”

Then, more soberly, he adds: “Anybody in the world can wind up on the street.”

The Micah Center, open since March 2010, averages 32 guests each day, most of them men, three days a week. In addition to showers and laundry service, it offers haircuts; a permanent address and telephone number where guests can be contacted by family or prospective employers; access to a computer for job searches, as well as other agencies, such as Social Security and the Mississippi WIN Job Center. It’s intended as a one-stop-shop for many service opportunities that might otherwise be denied homeless people.

Micah Center volunteer Max Brooke, of China Grove, North Carolina, finds the Micah Center a good way to get hands-on experience working with the homeless.

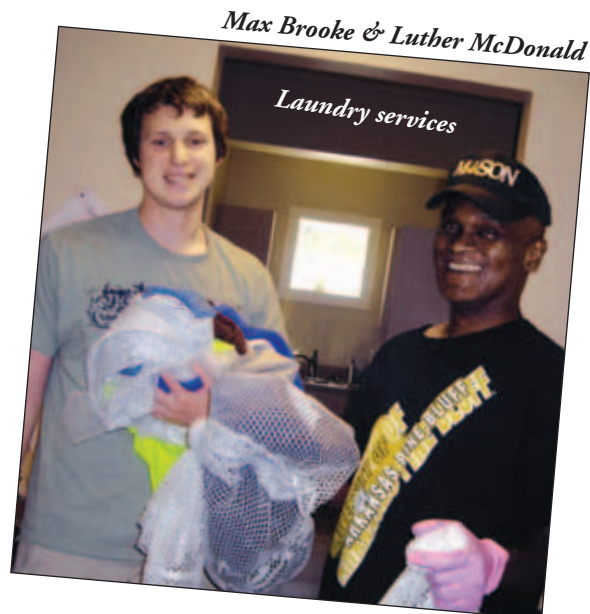
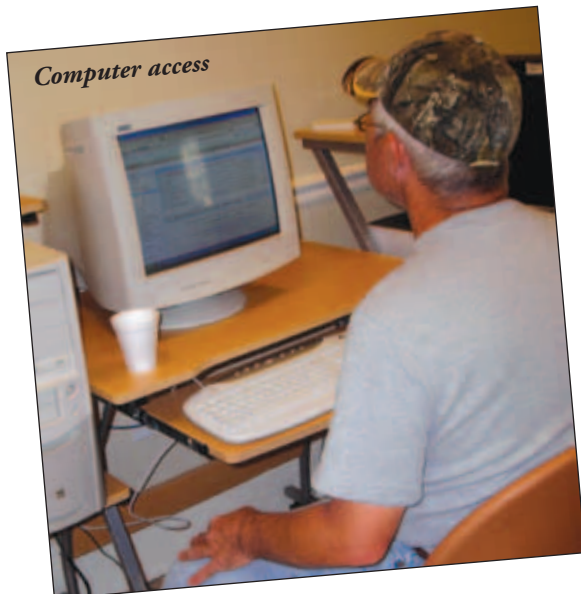
“I enjoy spending time with them,” he says. “They’re interesting and nice.”

“You get a new perspective on homelessness when you actually work with them.”

Max and his twin brother, Richard, are visiting Back Bay Mission on a UCC-sponsored cross-country volunteer jaunt, traveling for two months to special missionary sites, observing, working and filming a presentation to be unveiled at the UCC’s General Synod in Tampa June 30-July 6. They have spent two months at Back Bay Mission (see related story on p. 5)

Luther McDonald, another Micah Center volunteer, moved to the Gulf Coast last fall from Tampa, looking for a job. He hasn’t found one yet, but is optimistic. With 15 years’ experience as a social services caseworker, he has worked in homeless shelters and for him, volunteering at the Micah Center is a way “to stay connected.”

For both volunteers and guests, in a variety of ways, the Micah Center does, indeed, seem to be a way to stay connected.



Thank You!

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-B-

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Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

Bethel UCC
Manchester, Michigan
Bethlehem UCC-Women's Guild
Maple Lake, Minnesota

Bethlehem UCC - Women's Fellowship
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Buckland UCC-Women's Fellowship
Buckland, Ohio

-C-

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Chapel Hills UCC
Edina, Minnesota

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Brockton, Massachusetts

Christ UCC
Dupo, Illinois

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Indian Rocks Beach, Florida

Church of the Redeemer
Westlake, Ohio

Community Congregational-Women's Fellowship
New Port Richey, Florida

Congregational Church
Mystic, Connecticut

Congregational Church
Middlebury, Vermont

Congregational Church
South Hero, Vermont

Congregational Church-Evening Women's Association
Prospect, Connecticut

Congregational UCC-Women's Fellowship
St. Charles, Illinois

Congregational-Women's Fellowship
Baudette, Minnesota

-D-

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Kettering, Ohio
David's UCC
Canal Winchester, Ohio

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Emmanuel Baust UCC
Westminster, Maryland
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Massena, New York
Emmanuel UCC
Allentown, Pennsylvania
English Congregational UCC
Big Rock, Illinois

-F-

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Faith UCC
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 Oxford UCC
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IN YOUR WILL?

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First Congregational – *Ithaca, New York*
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*Although several churches may have collaborated
in a recovery trip, only the name of the church
that organized the group is listed.*

Thanks!

*Your generosity helps us continue (1) **emergency assistance** to people in need; (2) **disaster recovery teams** (youth and adult) to restore hurricane-damaged homes; (3) **mission interpretation** events that illustrate the church's work to alleviate suffering and seek justice; (4) **Center for Community Ministry** training and continuing education events; (5) **community empowerment** for meeting emerging needs with cooperative solutions through organizing and advocacy; (6) **homeless housing programs**; (7) **developing affordable housing**.*

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