"A Power In This Place"
Why Gerald Catron fell in love with Biloxi
featured on page 6
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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.”

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Back Bay Mission has an “official” Facebook page.
www.facebook.com/BackBayMission

Come check us out and share stories, comments, and photos about your experience here at Back Bay Mission.
The Power of Volunteer Service

If I were to ask you what Back Bay Mission does, you’d probably think first of our client-directed programs. You might mention the more than 400 families each month that have food on their tables because of our food pantry services, or the households that still have electricity because of our financial assistance. Perhaps you would think of our Micah Day Center and other vital programs serving those who are homeless, and the ways we treat each homeless guest with dignity and care. Images of housing might come to mind, the homes we build and the homes we repair in an effort to revitalize neighborhoods and ensure safe and dignified housing for lower income families. Or maybe you would think of our historic commitment to advocacy and community development over these last 90 years, one more way we live out our core value of social justice.

All of these things are at the heart of what we do, no doubt about it. These are the programs that result in literally thousands of individual lives being positively impacted each and every year. Hungry families are fed. Homeless people are housed. Economically fragile households are given the boost they need to stabilize. Communities are substantially changed to better serve the most vulnerable among us.

Yet there is another aspect of what we do and have done for decades that is equally transformative and worthy of note: we provide extraordinary and life-changing experiences for volunteers. Since at least the 1960’s, volunteers have been an essential component of how we accomplish our ministries. During the Civil Rights period, volunteers like George Wright from the University of Michigan marched at our side as we fought for equal rights. (See separate article.) And since the 1960’s, Back Bay Mission has hosted a steady stream of “workcamp” volunteers from throughout the United Church of Christ nationwide who have labored with us to repair housing and preserve low-income neighborhoods. In the first five years after Hurricane Katrina alone, the Mission hosted 7,464 volunteers who donated over $4 million worth of labor to recover our storm-battered communities. Incredible!

Today, volunteers continue to be a mainstay at Back Bay Mission. Some come for a week to perform housing rehabilitation tasks. Some come for longer terms, working as members of our staff team to help us achieve our mission. And some are residents of the local area, eager to make a difference in their own community. Regardless of the length of their stay or the nature of their work, all our volunteers tell us they are profoundly changed in the process. As one week-long volunteer recently stated in a letter she sent with a gift: “At the beginning of our volunteer week I thought I might have been looking to this trip to be a life-changing experience a bit too eagerly. But by the end of the week I knew I had found what I came seeking. I had indeed been changed, and received far more as a volunteer than I could possibly have ever given.”

As you read other stories we share throughout this newsletter’s pages, you’ll see more evidence of just how powerful a volunteer experience at Back Bay Mission can be……and that’s exactly what we intend.

We know that part of changing the world is changing minds and hearts one person at a time. And as people of faith, we know that humble acts of service are the highest forms of sharing God’s love. We give God thanks for our volunteers and all the ways they help us multiply our ministry and our impact. And we pledge to continue providing the most extraordinary volunteer experiences, one powerful moment, one meaningful lesson at a time.

Grace and peace,

Shara K Prestemon
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, sprestemon@thebackbaymission.org or 228-432-0301 ext. 303.

“Second Liners Mardi Gras Club” of MS Gulf Coast stopped by Back Bay Mission to present a gift to Executive Director Shari Prestemon.
Miles to go

Name: Doerte Hesselmen
In German: Dörte Heßelmann
From: Dinslaken, Germany
Position: Micah Day Center Coordinator (Volunteer)
Duties: Performs multiple administrative support functions, as well as client service support activities.

Doerte Hesselmen, arrived in Biloxi, MS January 4, 2012 as part of an international volunteer program. This was her first visit to the states in any capacity, yet she fit in as if she were a native of Biloxi.

As Doerte’s volunteer service time winds down here at Back Bay Mission, I caught up with Doerte to discuss her experience at Back Bay, the culture shock of working in the states, lessons learned and what advice Doerte would give her replacement.

How did you find out that you were coming to Biloxi, MS?
My assignment coordinator called me and said Back Bay in Biloxi, MS needed somebody. I’d never heard of Back Bay or Biloxi, but I was eager to help out wherever I was needed.

What was your first day like at the Day Center?
Actually, there was a volunteer lunch on my first day. They were honoring volunteers who had worked at Back Bay. I felt special immediately when I noticed that they had a place for me and I hadn’t even started.

What were your first interactions with Day Center clients?
Seemed as though everyone knew I was coming. They’d say, “Oh you’re the German girl.” Everyone on staff and even the clients were very patient with me.

You’re in a different country, different surroundings. When you were off work what did you do for recreation?
I played a lot of sports. I went to the local community center and got involved with a pick up volleyball team. I’d go to the beach, very often. The volunteer groups that would come down to rebuild houses often invited me over for dinner.

What was one of the first lessons you learned on duty at the Day Center?
Wow! A shower can make a difference.

In what way?
Well not just appearance but the way a person feels. The clients had new attitudes about everything when they would come out of the showers. I am glad we can provide that service.

Had you ever worked in an environment that served the needs of the homeless?
No. It was weird working here at first because I admit I had blinders on when I dealt with our homeless clients. Once I started working with them, it changed the way I felt.

How do you see the impact of Back Bay Mission in this area?
We have a big impact. We start by treating our clients like people. I know it’s not realistic to help everybody but one person matters and I’ve discovered that.

What are some life lessons that you’ve learned during your time here?
I’ve learned to sit and to reflect. I’ve become more reflective by being here. I’ve learned there are many reasons some are homeless.

What have you learned about the rewards of volunteering?
The biggest reward is the gratefulness of our guests. When I see them move on I get kind of sad that I won’t see them around anymore. But, I also know that they’re in a better place. (visibly moved)

Are you alright?
Yes

Let’s say that your replacement is reading this interview right now. What would you want them to know about Back Bay Mission and this experience?
Back Bay Mission is going to be a place where you can feel at home. You will experience a very welcoming environment and helpful staff members. The work is a lot of fun because you get to know new people with different stories every day and you can learn a lot from that. It is a wonderful experience to have an impact on other people’s lives and also to notice how they change you.

We are pleased to announce the additions of Chris Marlin-Warfield and Derek Eady to our team.

Chris is our Church Relations Associate and Derek is our Community Relations Associate. Chris will work to strengthen individual and congregational support for Back Bay Mission within the UCC. Derek will work to develop a stronger network of support on the MS Gulf Coast.
Celebrating 90 Years of Transformative Ministry

In this 90th Anniversary year of Back Bay Mission’s founding, The Changing Tides will feature narrative snapshots of the Mission’s history. Many thanks to Back Bay Mission historian & United Church of Christ member Terry White (Falmouth, MA) for contributing these historical articles.

The Wade-In of 1963

By Terry White

There have been many events in the life of Back Bay Mission that have both reflected its faith-based commitment to social justice and shaped its future. The wade-in of 1963, the casino challenge of the 1990s, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 come quickly to mind.

On June 23, 1963, three persons associated with the Mission joined sixty-nine Blacks in an effort to integrate the Biloxi beaches. The third attempt under the leadership of Black physician Gilbert Mason, the 1963 event recalled the bloody ending to the 1960 wade-in and for the first time included whites. Back Bay Mission director, the reverend Roger Gallagher; pastor of the UCC Biloxi congregation, the reverend Jack Aregood, and University of Michigan student and Back Bay Mission summer volunteer, George Wright, driven by the faith commitment to social justice that has long characterized Back Bay Mission, joined the wade-in and were arrested and convicted. The conviction was later overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. While an apparent failure, the wade-in led to eventual opening of the beaches and broader integration of the community.

Reaction to the wade-in led to the decline of the UCC congregation in Biloxi and tension between the Mission and the Biloxi community. However, the event became a symbol of the Mission’s commitment to justice and its willingness to live out the faith that gave it birth. The wade-in also has given courage to the Mission staff and its supporters over the years to persevere in its mission.

VOLUNTEER GROUPS THAT SERVED March 2012 – June 2012

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!

United Protestant; Grayslake, IL
Heidelberg College; Tiffin, OH
Faith UCC; State College, PA
Amherst Comm. Church, Amherst, NY
Longmont UCC; Longmont, CO
Fist Cong of Lake Worth, FL
Illinois South Conference, IL
Columbia UCC; Columbia, CT
UCC; Cedar Falls, IA
UCC-Greenawalds; Allentown, PA
First Community; Columbus, OH
First UCC; Carlisle, PA
Share Kindness, St Louis, MO
Immanuel UCC; Carlyle, IL
First Federated Church; Peoria, IL
St Paul’s UCC; Manheim, PA

This volunteer group made the journey to Biloxi from St Paul’s UCC located in Manheim, PA.
Ask Berea, Kentucky native Gerald Catron to sum up Biloxi, MS. Ask him to discuss Back Bay Mission, the residents that make up this community and his experience in volunteering to help rebuild what Hurricane Katrina destroyed.

Gerald won’t necessarily bring up seafood, or southern hospitality. You won’t hear much about the strength of Magnolia trees rupturing top soil and springing to life in their full Mississippi blossom. There aren’t mentions of beaches, tropical weather, or places to “try one’s luck.”

Gerald may eventually get to all those things, but none of those things are first. When you ask Gerald Catron about Biloxi, and Back Bay Mission, one word describes in totality his experience…power. “There’s a power in this place” says Gerald when asked what keeps drawing him to this area.

Gerald’s first trip ever to Mississippi came in 2009 when Gerald’s home church, Union Church in Berea KY, sent a volunteer group to rebuild homes on the Gulf Coast as part of Back Bay Mission’s Housing Recovery program. “I was the group’s cook,” Gerald says with a laugh. “The funny thing is that I was the only one in the group with a background in carpentry.”

Whatever skills Gerald possessed would soon be put to the test when a court order demanded that a house be demolished, leaving a Biloxi family with nowhere to turn and no hopes of returning back to the place they once called home. Back Bay Mission appealed to the courts that the home could be rehabbed, and subsequently a court order was issued to stop demolition.

The demolition was halted, but not forever. The court declared that the project had to be completed by early January, and this was almost Thanksgiving. Gerald felt compelled to act. He felt as if he had been called and brought down to Biloxi, to see this project all the way through.

Gerald went back to Kentucky with his volunteer group to be with his family during Thanksgiving. Then immediately after the holiday, Gerald was on his way back to Biloxi, to finish the job and see this local family back in their home.

This was a “get it done at all costs project” says Gerald. “The house needed to be trimmed out, cabinets had to be hung, floors needed putting down; it was basically the entire inside that needed to be completed.” Gerald’s work days became work nights, starting at 8:00am and working to 12:00am, sleeping on a cot, when he could sleep.

Gerald slept many nights in the unfinished home. When I asked Gerald what kept him going through the cold, rainy, and lonely nights, Gerald replied, “I just wanted to see those people back in their home.”

That he did. The homeowners were able to move back in and since 2009 Gerald has come back to this place of power over 15 times. “I’ve been blessed and I have the skills and talents to help, so why not,” adds Gerald.

Gerald also says that, “I receive as much of a blessing as the homeowners.” Gerald’s family and friends have since made trips down to experience the “power” of this place.

“My best friend of thirty years who has never been on the coast came for visit and now has fallen in love with this area. He says he wants to come down to volunteer his services,” Gerald says with a leaning smile.

As for Gerald, he and his wife have just made the momentous decision to become permanent residents of the Gulf Coast. Gerald’s many missions to the coast, working on great Back Bay Mission projects, and meeting the warmhearted people on Mississippi’s coast have served as catalysts for such a life-altering move.

For Gerald, moving down to the coast was the natural order of things. The trips back and forth and, constantly thinking about the coast when he was back in Kentucky all culminated in a decision that was three years in the making.

Gerald and his family will soon be trading blue grass for blue crabs. They know they’ll be missed by their relatives and their Union church family. Still, for the Catron family they simply can’t escape the pull, the luring, and the tugging of their heart strings reeling them to the coast….for good.

I asked Gerald why he feels Back Bay’s Housing Recovery program is so important. “Home is where the heart is.” Gerald replied.

He then added, “It’s a chance to give people what you would want. And I guess that’s real power.”
Thank You! Your generosity enables our ministry and changes lives.

The following gifts were received between February 2012 - June 2012 only.

**CONGREGATIONAL GIVING**

- **A**
  - To help the local homeless population
  - Rev. Dr. George A. H. Koenig

- **B**
  - To support the local food bank
  - Rev. Dr. Thomas J. P. Clark

- **C**
  - For the purchase of new church pews
  - Rev. Dr. Samuel W. Brown

- **D**
  - To help with the construction of a new sanctuary
  - Rev. Dr. John M. Smith

- **E**
  - For the purchase of new hymnals for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. Jane E. Miller

- **F**
  - To support the local school's music program
  - Rev. Dr. Robert E. Brown

- **G**
  - For the purchase of new Bibles for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Jones

- **H**
  - To support the local hospital's cancer research center
  - Rev. Dr. William J. Smith

- **I**
  - For the purchase of new organs for the church
  - Rev. Dr. Elizabeth A. Brown

- **J**
  - To support the local seniors' center
  - Rev. Dr. John A. Brown

- **K**
  - For the purchase of new hymnals for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **L**
  - To support the local food bank's operations
  - Rev. Dr. John E. Brown

- **M**
  - For the purchase of new Bibles for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. John E. Brown

- **N**
  - To support the local hospital's emergency department
  - Rev. Dr. John E. Brown

- **O**
  - For the purchase of new hymnals for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **P**
  - To support the local school's music program
  - Rev. Dr. Robert E. Brown

- **Q**
  - For the purchase of new Bibles for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **R**
  - To support the local hospital's cancer research center
  - Rev. Dr. William J. Smith

- **S**
  - For the purchase of new hymnals for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **T**
  - To support the local food bank's operations
  - Rev. Dr. John E. Brown

- **U**
  - For the purchase of new Bibles for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **V**
  - To support the local hospital's emergency department
  - Rev. Dr. John E. Brown

- **W**
  - For the purchase of new hymnals for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **X**
  - To support the local school's music program
  - Rev. Dr. Robert E. Brown

- **Y**
  - For the purchase of new Bibles for the congregation
  - Rev. Dr. James E. Brown

- **Z**
  - To support the local hospital's cancer research center
  - Rev. Dr. William J. Smith

**MEMORIAL GIFTS**

- **A**
  - In memory of Mr. Robert D. Rieder
  - Rev. and Mrs. Thomas P. Perl

- **B**
  - In memory of Bill Fairchild
  - Rev. and Mrs. Thomas P. Perl

- **C**
  - In memory of Steven Hitcock
  - Rev. and Mrs. Thomas P. Perl

- **D**
  - In memory of Mr. Robert Hope
  - Rev. and Mrs. Thomas P. Perl

- **E**
  - In memory of Mr. Albert Hope
  - Rev. and Mrs. Thomas P. Perl

- **F**
  - In memory of Mr. Robert Hope
  - Rev. and Mrs. Thomas P. Perl

- **G**
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Celebrating 90 Years of Transformative Ministry

Back Bay Mission
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