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The Changing Tides

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."

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I know pride can be a dangerous thing, but sometimes I just can't help myself when it comes to Back Bay Mission. Pride fills my heart when I recognize so clearly the good and meaningful work we have done.

One of those proud moments was at the recent 50th anniversary commemoration of the 1963 Biloxi wade-in. The 60's were tumultuous times in Mississippi, and the struggle for civil rights was fierce. "Wade-ins" were peaceful protests waged by civil rights activists to integrate segregated beaches, and there had already been two such wade-ins in Biloxi, one in 1960 ending with mob violence. In 1963, three individuals from Back Bay Mission would make the courageous choice to be the only white participants in the wade-in: Reverend Jack Aregood, Reverend Roger Gallagher, and a college-age intern at the Mission, George Wright. Though no violence erupted on that day, there were bitter consequences for them, for the Mission, and for our United Church of Christ congregations in Biloxi. Church members left in anger, the safety of these men and their families was threatened, and the Mission became a target for vandalism and outrage. But yet they had made the faithful choice on that hot June day in 1963, to stand in solidarity with those who were suffering, to let God's justice roll. And yes, that makes me proud.

I felt that unmistakable swell of pride on another recent day as well, when I saw one of our clients for the first time in weeks. Val was well known to most of us at the Mission, a homeless man who'd spent years on the streets before finding our Micah Day Center and then becoming a resident in our Home At Last program. Val struggled with chronic alcohol abuse, so one often saw him looking grizzled and unkempt. But on this recent day when I saw him, that wasn't the case. His step was steady, his appearance healthy, his eyes clear. He had just gotten back from a residential alcohol treatment program we had arranged, part of the case management plan his BBM case worker had developed with him. And the difference was stunning. When I spoke with him later, he was quiet but confident, determined to stay sober and grateful for a new beginning. I'm proud of him, and pleased that BBM is part of the journey with him.

I could name a thousand more proud moments of Back Bay Mission's ministry: driving through local neighborhoods and realizing that just how many of the homes have been lovingly repaired and rebuilt by BBM volunteers; the instant when a desperate family realizes with visible relief that we can actually help; the multiple times we have stood for justice and compassion with those who often find the world friendless and unkind. Indeed, we have much about which we can feel proud.

Yet nothing we've done and will ever do can ever be accomplished alone. Of this I am certain. It takes every one of our wonderful staff team, dedicated to service and excellence. It takes each incredible volunteer, so eager to contribute their talents and their hearts. It takes each generous giver, investing their trust and their treasure in this ministry we share. Together we accomplish something about which all of us can be proud.

Grace and peace,

Sharon K Prestemon

Reverend Shari Prestemon

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.

"Walk of Faith" committee members stopped by to present a donation to Back Bay Mission to present a $500.00 donation.

We Love Our Friends & Volunteers

Left to Right: Mr. Rudolph Downs and Rev. Shari Prestemon

Rev. Shari Prestemon, Executive Director of Back Bay Mission and Mr. Rudolph Downs, HomePort resident (Back Bay Mission's home for homeless disabled veterans) addressed a crowd of young guests from First Congregational United Church of Christ, Western Springs, IL. Over 100 youth hit Mississippi's Gulf Coast during their spring break but not for the usual reasons. This group came to participate in service projects assisting low income Gulf Coast residents.

Executive Director Shari Prestemon with Dr. Gilbert Mason, Jr., at the Biloxi commemoration celebrating 50 years of beach desegregation. Dr. Mason's father was one of the original leaders attempting to integrate the beaches of Southern Mississippi. Three persons associated with the Mission in 1963 joined sixty-nine others protesting the segregation of local beaches.

Pictured from Left to Right: Ms. Ethel Curry (Volunteer), Lavada Vincent, and Sonny Vincent.

Sonny and Lavada Vincent of Live in the Give Ministries stopped by the Mission to drop off several items for our guests at the Micah Center and our Home At Last program.

Cathy Wildschuetz, a Back Bay Mission volunteer recently was honored by the United Way of South Mississippi with the President's Volunteer Service Award. The President's Volunteer Service Award is a national award recognizing volunteer service. Cathy was instrumental in assisting with last December's extremely successful Christmas baskets and backpacks giveaway.

Volunteers from the United Church of Christ, North Hampton, NH enjoy cooking dinner at Back Bay Mission's Mission House.

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Thanks for your help!

A Mission Moment

By Rev. Michele Bagby Allan Pastor, The United Church of Christ, North Hampton, NH

Our journey to Back Bay Mission felt blessed from its beginning. Our faith community has long engaged in mission/learning trips for youth, and over the years this commitment has taken us to Mexico, San Antonio, TX, New York City, and Boston. Every experience has been blessed in its own way. This year, we took the time to invite the youth to express where they would most like to give of themselves in service through a very intentional process. They poured over the 40 pages of mission opportunities available through the UCC. They prioritized three opportunities based upon their hopes to learn something new, to engage with a diversity of people and cultures, and to give of themselves in meaningful service. Leaders contacted the 3 organizations to learn more and brought the findings back to the youth. Together the youth selected Back Bay Mission for their 2013 Youth Mission Trip.

The journey continued to be serendipitously blessed even before it began through opportunities to meet the Back Bay Mission Director, Shari Prestemon, at the New Hampshire Conference Annual Meeting and the opportunity to meet the other group that would be at Back Bay Mission with us, a group of adults who live just an hour north of our town.

We arrived, new to the area and after very little sleep, having left for our journey at 3 am. We were greeted by the other mission group and by Back Bay Mission staff with grand hospitality and a warm meal ready and prepared. We settled in excited and wondering what life would be like for the week ahead.

We were continually blessed over the course of our week with meaningful projects, challenging opportunities, and chances to offer our hands in service directly with people in the Biloxi community. Many of the youth were particularly grateful to serve at the Micah Center, the food pantry, and at Loaves and Fishes' hunger ministry. These opportunities rounded out the more physical construction work and gave them greater understandings of the life stories and experiences of the people whom they met.

As is no doubt often relayed in the reflections from mission trippers, it is difficult to put into words the depth of gratitude that our group felt in being able to participate in the ministry of Back Bay Mission. We were changed and challenged, blessed and overwhelmed, inspired and encouraged. While our young people (and adult leaders) learned how to mud, they also learned about one another, and grew in understanding of and compassion for the struggles of others. While they did demolition and learned the fine art of identifying poison ivy, they learned to give of themselves and to see the face of God in the person working very hard to find his daily bread. These are the gifts that defy words, really.

At the end of each mission trip, it has become our practice to spend an evening processing our experiences. Often a leader will pose questions to the youth, and they will respond with their thoughts. Depending on the group dynamics and the fatigue level, this exercise is sometimes filled with a fair amount of silence. Other times, again depending upon the group, the time is filled with a fair few tears. This year, while I had written a number of questions on the white board so that they could be thinking about them, one question consumed most of our reflection time. For more than an hour, our group of 12 youth and 5 adults talked about this question. "Where did you see God this week?" The youth saw God in one another and in the ways that they cared for one another as they learned and grew. They saw God in their leaders, in the other adult group that was there with us, in the guests at the Micah Center and at Loaves and Fishes. They saw God in the stories of survival and perseverance. They saw God in the work of the staff at Back Bay Mission. Nearly at every turn, they had the opportunity through their mission service and learning to see the face of God in friend and stranger and in the challenge and change to which they were called.

Ours may have been a fairly unique group of youth, as we had young people from 6 different churches who came together to spend their April vacation working together in service in a place none of them had ever experienced. That they all were blessed with such experiences of God's love and abiding presence is a blessing that trumps them all. We extend a depth of gratitude to the people of Back Bay Mission and the Biloxi community. May your continuing housing recovery and compassionate efforts be blessed with the same kind of encouragement that you have given us. Indeed, we have seen God in this work and in the ways that we have been blessed to partner together.

Volunteers from The United Church of Christ, North Hampton, NH

Since we last spoke...

Back Bay Mission took part in the United Church of Christ's Mission 4/1 Earth initiative. Mission 4/1 Earth is "one united church on a shared resurrection witness for Planet Earth during 50 great days of greening up, powering down, and shouting out for the environment."

In an effort to support this initiative Back Bay Mission staff, Board of Directors, volunteers, and local community partners have planted 10 trees (7 locally and 3 across the globe), and volunteered more than 300 hours. Below are images captured of various clean-up and tree planting activities in support of Mission 4/1 Earth.

Mission 4/1 Earth Initiative

Evangelical UCC of Highland, IL and First Community Church of Columbus, OH help plant a tree during their week of volunteering at the Mission.

Back Bay Mission's Board of Directors and staff help plant a tree on the Mission's campus.

Volunteers from South Congregational Church of Kennebunkport, ME and North Hampton UCC of North Hampton, NH along with Back Bay Mission staff help with clean-up in Biloxi as part of Mission 4/1 Earth.

Our community partners from the Beau Rivage joined us to pick up litter.

The Averhart Family (Biloxi) enjoyed planting their new tree. Back Bay Mission staff and volunteers from Evangelical UCC of Highland, IL and First Community Church of Columbus, OH were also on hand to help.

Zwingli UCC of Souderton, PA and First UCC of Carlisle, PA participated in a tree planting in Biloxi.

Partnership Brings Opportunity

by Derek Eady

When Kenney Washington, Director of Client Services for Back Bay Mission sat down with Jennifer Williams, Director of Catholic Social and Community Services for the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi, to discuss several issues facing both organizations, neither could have known that a life changing event was about to happen.

The two have been constant collaborators bouncing ideas off each other in an effort to come up with the type of innovative and impactful services both organizations are known for here on the Gulf Coast.

Williams had a dilemma concerning Catholic Charities' Twelve Baskets Food Bank. Twelve Baskets is a food distribution center which Williams oversees that was in need of someone with warehouse and distribution experience. Washington immediately saw this as an opportunity for both organizations to step up in a new way. "I was looking at how to get our clients employed and a way that Jennifer's organization could get their employment need met," says Washington.

The two had formerly collaborated on other services with Emergency Assistance being the most recent, but never on employment issues. "The trick was finding someone who wants to work, someone who no one else would give a chance, and someone who had the experience to fill this position," says Williams. "It was important for us to fill all of those aspects."

Kenney left the meeting with the challenge of finding someone who would match what Jennifer was looking for, represent Back Bay well, and potentially serve as an ambassador for this model of partnership.

Kenney did not have to look far. Right under his nose at the Micah Day Center was a guest who had been coming since 2012 and who would end up being the perfect candidate.

Rodney Harris has been coming to the Micah Day Center since 2012, when, after the tragic death of his wife, he found himself homeless. Harris's wife had had a stroke and the mounting hospital bills drove Harris's family into financial ruin. Like so many Americans with medical debt, Harris ended up losing the home he and his wife had made and ultimately living out of his vehicle.

"I didn't want to stay with family because I didn't want to be a burden. This was my issue," says Harris. "I stayed some nights with friends and I got temporary jobs that paid enough for me to get a hotel room at times," adds Harris.

Harris had the experience that Mrs. Williams was looking for and Washington saw Harris as just the right person to represent many of the Mission's clients in this unique situation. Harris went through the interview process and was later informed that he had been chosen for the position.

Left to right: *Jennifer Williams, Rodney Harris, and Kenney Washington*

"Based on his resumé he is way over qualified," says Williams. "We didn't talk about the program or why the person was picked. In the look on his face; I saw him seeing his life becoming different," Williams continued.

Harris has been on the job now for over a month and everyday is a clear reminder not only of what he went through, but how it's turning around. "So many need an opportunity." says Harris, "I like what I'm doing because I'm helping other people."

Harris continues, "My wife used to volunteer and even though I work here (not volunteering), I figure I'm making her happy."

Harris is also making co-workers very happy. Jennifer Keegan, Director of Twelve Baskets, is Harris's immediate supervisor and she voiced high praises for Harris: "He is non-stop! With him we've been able to accomplish so much because he is such a hard worker. We are glad to have him."

Williams and Washington hope that Harris's placement is only the beginning in what will evolve into a model of job placement practices. "We hope to connect with retailers and other distribution points to offer employment opportunities," said Washington.

Williams added, "We also hope to bring someone else in within the next 6 months, and have Harris mentor them."

When asked what he hopes to have come out of this opportunity, Harris responded, "A home and a future. A home and a future."

Thank You! Your generosity enables our ministry and changes lives.

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-Brookfield, WI
Trinity UCC
-Canton, OH

U

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F

First Community Church Women's Guild
In honor of Paul Baumer

H

Mrs. Colleen Hafner
In honor of Rev. Jeanette Sherrill

M

Ms. Dorothy Mitchell
In honor of Bill Mitchell
Mr. John Mitchell
In honor of William Mitchell
Ms. Kathleen Mitchell
In honor of William Mitchell
Ms. Catherine Moses
In honor of Back Bay Mission

N

Rogin Nassau LLC
In honor of Mary Wright

P

John & Sheryl Prestemon
In honor of Shari Prestemon
Ms. Sharon Fowler & Ms. Barbara Putrino
In honor of William & Jennifer Fowler

R

Marilyn E. Ries
In honor of Rev Shelly

S

Phil & Barbara Salstrom
In honor of Mr. & Mrs. John Prestemon
Rev. Alfred Schroeder & Mrs. Catherine Sprague
In honor of Kevin & Vivian Rettig
Mr. & Mrs. Dick & Nancy Schultz
In honor of the Hanser Family

T

Mike Tilden
In honor of Plymouth Fellowship
Timothy & Kay Treu
In honor of May Theo Hudnall

V

Mr. & Mrs. James & Nancy Vodra
In honor of William W. & Dru Vodra

U

Union Congregational Church Men's Fellowship
In honor of BBM

W

Lynda Weston
In honor of Rev. Keith Stuart & Cynthia Stuart
Ms. Ruth White
In honor of Richard Gourley
Mr. & Mrs. Alvin & Norean Woodin
In honor of Betsy Tobak

MEMORIAL GIFTS

A

Mrs. Shirley Adams
In memory of Jimmy Adams Jr.
Mr. & Mrs. Jim & Anita Altenbaumer
In memory of Ron Kuhlman
Mr. & Mrs. Robert & Holly Antkowiak
In memory of Bernice Hoberg

B

Mary Bryant-Miller
In memory of Mary Bryant
Mr Derrick M Byrd, Jr
In memory of Rev. & Mrs. Derrick M. Byrd Sr.

C

Ms. Marjorie Cooley
In memory of Henry Cooley
Mr. & Mrs. Dick & Doreve Cridlebaugh
In memory of GB Gridlebaugh & Walter Alole

F

Mrs. Wilma Farmer
In memory of Rev. Dr. Clifford Farmer, Bruce & Chris Farmer
Dr. Randall Fellman
In memory of Kerry
Ms. Barbara Fleshman
In memory of Mildred & Leroy Fleshman
Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Bonnie Kay Forry
In memory of Marlene Dietz

H

Mr. & Mrs. Walter & Sherry Halvorson
In memory of Richard Sandry
Norma Heinbuch
In memory of Rev. Henry Heinbuch

I

Mr. Edward Ikerd
In memory of Elizabeth B. Ikerd

J

Mr. Scott Allan Joyce
In memory of Grace C. Joyce

K

Mrs. Patricia Kern
In memory of Rev Barry Kern
Rev. & Mrs. Paul & Dorothy Kiewit
In memory of Dorothy Kiewit
Mrs. Lynda Knight
In memory of Butch Knight

L

Chris Lambert
In memory of Marie Hayes

O

Ms. Ellen Ott
In memory of Frank & Ester Rocille

P

Mr. & Mrs. Bill & Judith Page
In memory of JohnGmeiner
Ms. Marian Plant Petry
In memory of John H. Petry Jr.
Mrs. Helen Purcell
In memory Bill Purcell

R

Ms. Janet Roberts
In memory of Rev. David W. Roberts

S

Ms. Jean Snitker
In memory of Verla A. Cade
Mr. Edward "Pete" Stander
In memory of Eileen
Mrs. Janette Streiff
In memory of Kenneth Streiff

T

Mr. & Mrs. James & Susan Torrant
In memory of Mr. & Mrs. Stanley W. Graham
Mr. & Mrs. L.G. & M.F. Turner-Harrington
In memory of Deborah A. Coquillon

V

Mr. & Mrs. John & Bonnie Van Overbeke
In memory of Brett Turner

W

Mr. & Mrs. Robert & Jan Wilbur
In memory of Bill Fairchild

STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOODS, SEEKING JUSTICE, TRANSFORMING LIVES

Back Bay Mission
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Biloxi, MS 39530

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