THE
CHANGING TIDES

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Reflections from the Executive Director

2020 has been quite a year, and we are only at the halfway point. The covid-19 pandemic revealed in dramatic ways the legacy of health equities for people of color with underlying health as well as the realities of survival for low-income communities. With the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the video encounter between a dog owner and a bird watcher we also faced in stark relief the impact of racism across differing social support systems: health care, policing, and the economy.

As a result of increased awareness many people have been willing to engage in difficult painful conversations about who we really are as a nation and what we really mean when we say, all people are created equal. Many people have probed the meaning of privilege exploring its effect on routine interactions in workplaces, housing, and employment opportunities. Crowds composed of all races continue to protest reform in how we serve and protect the health and safety of fellow citizens. I am experiencing a range of emotions, anger, sadness, relief, and hopefulness. Will we, in this moment, make meaningful movement toward a more perfect union? Will we risk difficult conversations with people who see the world through a different lens? Will we ask questions about the challenges of those fellow citizens who do not have access to resources that we take for granted? How these questions are answered impacts directly the work that we do at Back Bay Mission.

Here at Back Bay Mission through our programs we provide services to individuals and families in stages varying from hopefulness to despair about their life situation. Many of our guests/clients have given up any hope of achieving the “American Dream” and while others come hoping that they will get that opportunity, that support that could really make a difference in altering the trajectory of their lives. People are homeless or with no/low income for a wide variety of reasons: alcohol/drug abuse, gambling addiction; overwhelming medical bills and debilitating illness; divorce, job loss, bad financial decisions, evictions, and home foreclosure, just to name a few. Still other guest/clients seek our services due to the legacy of generational poverty that limited their vision and therefore, their aspirations.

The national conversation around a social safety net for those fallen on hard times has intensified as covid-19 has caused the loss of jobs and health care. The fragility of financial life for the working poor who are often the industry housekeepers, janitors, and clerks as well as staff in our favorite restaurants, entertainment venues and recreational outlets has been highlighted. In the absence of childcare, transportation challenges, loss of healthcare, and the threat of eviction we find these guests/clients at Back Bay Mission seeking relief from impending disaster.

In this context, Back Bay Mission can only provide band-aid relief as the people we serve face the reality that some jobs will not come back. So, they will be earning less money and will be unable to afford childcare and healthcare. We have received some funding to, in modest ways, covid -19 impacted clients. It is difficult to talk about working toward long-term sustainability with people holding on by a very thin thread. We can provide encouragement, coaching, brainstorming and prayer. We provide financial support in ways that we see as equitable from our limited resources. We are doing limited housing recovery to the extent that we can partner rehab work with the Energywise program. Due to covid -19 we have not had Mission Campers since the first of March. Very few jobs are available for rental assistance clients, so we work to stretch our dollars to keep them stable until hiring picks up for low-skilled workers. Homeless clients are using our food pantry and Loaves & Fishes because resources for them during the pandemic are virtually non-existent. To date, we have assisted 40 homeless clients in applying for the stimulus.

Our mission is strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, and transforming lives. An expanded national conversation around the social safety net is imperative in support of BBM’s mission and all the non-profits that serve the most vulnerable in our community.

Executive Director, Alice Graham
Brick by Brick
Walls Go Up

Walls, we build them to keep us safe, we use them to keep people out, and we use them to provide comfort. What happens when we erect walls that isolate ourselves all while making prisons from others? If there are walls with no doors how do you ever let anyone in? What about the population that live outdoors with no walls? The illusion of bricks built up over time creating walls of prejudice, preconceived ideas, and lack of knowledge create walls that are often too high to scale. Most of the time we turn around because the effort in scaling those walls feels so overwhelming.

This picture rips the mortar off so many issues (bricks) such as: socioeconomics, poverty, gender, race, age, disabilities, and so many more. Brick-by-brick walls go up and people are left without resources and voices. This picture is in black and white because these three brave men see past prejudices, they stand united for a cause that is so much bigger than themselves. They stand for the fight their ancestors started, the conversations not yet had, and the right to be loved and heard. They deserve a second look. We deserve to hear their stories. For instance, the one gentleman is over 70 years old and homeless, but that is not what I see-he also cares for the tall adult male that has severe learning disabilities he always says, “don’t worry Mrs. Sarah I will watch out for him” I often see him buying the other gentleman food and sharing all he has with him and others. Stories make bricks come down, stories let you see the person behind the dirty hands, old shoes, and lack luster appearance. The gift of rehumanizing is the greatest gift we can give these people. Regardless of color, creed, religion, age, gender, differences we here at Back Bay Mission love people whomever you are-we tell their stories, we give them a voice, we are in the business of transforming lives.

So, I ask you do homeless lives matter? A wall can only fall with a lot of effort. I argue brick-by-brick each of us can see past the color after all love is very simple. 1 John 2:11 reminds us, “But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” We are not meant to be the light we are meant to shine the light in the dark places.

In Memory of
Mary Sue Wilson Fairchild
Walkway

A beautiful brick walkway will be started at Back Bay Mission with the first placed bricks to be in memory of Mary Sue Wilson Fairchild, past Back Bay Mission board member. The First Congregational Church of Houston worked with Back Bay Mission to find a way to honor Mary’s generous spirit for helping others. The bricks will be proudly displayed in a walkway starting in front of the Mission House and then continuing down the sidewalk. You can participate and support Back Bay Mission by buying a brick or two or three to honor someone, commemorate a mission trip, leave an inspiring note, and so on. Help us pave a way to a stronger future and provide opportunities for those we serve. To place a brick order please go to our dedicated webpage at www.bricksrus.com/donorsite/backbaymission.

Thank you again Mary Sue Wilson Fairchild for your generous spirit and your dedication to supporting causes that improved the lives of others.

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Brick Fundraiser

Help us pave the way to a stronger community...
We at Back Bay Mission take pride in our work and cherish every day we can help strengthen neighborhoods, seek justice and transform lives. That is why it was so heartbreaking when we had to temporarily close our doors in April due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our community was hurting. Those already marginalized could have easily been forgotten. Many families, already living check-to-check, began to feel the pressure as the economy came to a screeching halt. During that time millions of Americans were out of work and needed help. Here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, our dedicated staff was already coming together to plan our response. “How can we help those that are unable to help themselves in this ultimate time of need?”

With a burning passion and a tentative plan to reopen, a small but determined group of staffers, aided by those still working from home, reopened Back Bay Mission, but with restrictions. One of those restrictions was access to our Micah Day Center. Although we were able to reopen the Micah Day Center on a limited basis, we were unable to reopen full time without some modifications first. That is when Craig, Matt, and Loraine, of our amazing construction team here at Back Bay Mission, sprang into action. They were able to plan, design, secure the materials for and build some truly awesome, one-of-a-kind plexi-glass barriers! They first built and installed one in our administrative building, where we have our client’s choice food pantry, our various programs assisting those in need in our community, and even walk in clients that may need help but not know where to begin. It is where we answer the phones and our mail is delivered.

Next on the agenda, was the Micah Day Center. As many of you already know, our Micah Day Center is where we assist the homeless with hot showers, limited laundry service, mail service, and a place to seek refuge from the elements. Our Micah Day Center also includes access to one-on-one counseling through our wonderful Day Center Case Manager, Kirsten. Our construction team was able to design and build plexi-glass barriers for Ms. Deborah, at the front desk. She is usually the first face our guests at the Micah Day Center see. Then, the team turned their attention to Ms. Lucy and the clothing closet, where our guests in need can receive clean clothes. Both barriers in the Micah Day Center were designed, built and installed in about a week.

Another very helpful contribution came from you, the awesome supporters of Back Bay Mission from all over the country that took the time to make and send us facemasks, for everyone! Thanks to the hard work and generosity of our volunteers, we are equipped to have a mask on hand for not only every member of our staff, every volunteer, but also every guest that enters our doors. We can’t thank all of you enough!

The last piece of the puzzle to safely reopen was ensuring our facility was as clean and sanitary as possible. In addition to our normal cleaning guidelines, we implemented new safety standards, have sanitized & cleaned after guests as needed and we purchased a sanitizing fogging machine. The sanitizing fogging machine will be run once a week to ensure the entire facility is clean and sanitary, from top to bottom, to protect our staff and all of our guests’ health too. It was a mighty group effort but one well worth the work. Thanks to a combination of our wonderful volunteers continued support, our dedicated staff and especially Matt, Loraine and Craig’s hard work, we can now safely serve all guests that come to Back Bay Mission.
MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY LEADERS
SUPPORT REMOVAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI STATE FLAG

If we refuse to change the flag, we will not be able to establish the trust necessary to bring our state together. Our state will continue to see young people leave the state, taking its potential with them, and businesses will overlook Mississippi for neighboring states.

Building trust across racial lines is necessary to build a strong Mississippi and a strong economy. As the Mississippi Economic Council states in its Blueprint Mississippi report, "Stronger race relations can help communities work together more effectively, ensure diverse future leadership, and transform Mississippi into a place recognized not for where it has been, but for how far it has come." As our state confronts this wave of protests and the health and economic crises created by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to start rebuilding that lost trust and to choose symbols that reflect our values as Mississippians.

Medgar Evers was assassinated on June 12, 1963. In the wake of that tragedy, our communities had to stand back up and find a way to rebuild. Our country has been rocked by protests and demonstrations for the past two and a half weeks. Mississippi has the ability to make a bold statement for human dignity and, in doing so, give hope to young Mississippians that there is a future here.

How will we respond? We can create a new Mississippi for our children and grandchildren. As Myrlie Evers said in 1963, “You can kill a man, but you can’t kill an idea.” The new flag is an idea whose time has come. The annals of history have been filled with men and women who have spoken and stood for justice when history called. In this moment that demands bold, decisive leadership, we call on the legislature, Speaker of the House Phillip Gunn, Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann, and Governor Tate Reeves to lead with courage and to lift up a flag of which all Mississippians can be proud.

Signed,
Dr. Alice M. Graham, Gulfport, MS
Executive Director Back Bay Mission
Muhammad Abdur-Rahman, Jackson, MS
Youth Mentor
Rep. Zakiaia Summers, Jackson, MS
House District 68
Lesse Phillips, MD, MPH, Ridgeland, MS
CEO, Global Family Medicine PLLC
Jamie Rasberry, Jackson, MS
Sarah Stripp, Jackson, MS
Nonprofit Manager
Sara "Sunny" Baker, Oxford, MS
Co-Founder, Mississippi Farm to School Network
Stephanie Eubanks Wright, Meridian, MS
Community Partner, Wright Medical, Inc.
Byron D’Andra Orey, Jackson, MS
Professor of Political Science, Jackson State University
Jacqueline K. Hammack, Hattiesburg, MS
Attorney & Counselor at Law
William Murphy, Washington and Sunflower Counties, MS
Educator
Vondaris Gordon, Jackson, MS
Community Builder
Angela Carson, Canton, MS
Community Advocate
Patrick Wooms, Tallahatchie County, MS
Director, Emmett Till Memorial Commission
Deena Evers-Everette, Jackson, MS
Executive Director
Albert Sykes, Jackson, MS
Robby Luckett, Jackson, MS
Dirctor, Margaret Walker Center
Royal Walker, Ridgeland, MS
Community Advocate
Thea Faulkner, Jackson, MS
Community Builder

IMPACT STORIES

**The signatories to this statement are community leaders in a variety of fields working collaboratively throughout Mississippi to bridge the divides in our society and build a more equitable future for children and families.**
I was baptized and confirmed in a UCC Church in Dallastown, PA, so when I moved Connecticut to take the Head Men’s and Women’s Cross Country and Track Coach position at the University of Hartford, I was looking for a new church home. I attended church services one day at First Church UCC Glastonbury and right away knew I found a home. Even though it was a bigger church than I was used to, I was drawn to their support of several missions and sense of community. One of my first memories was a call for action encouraging members to take part in the annual intergenerational mission trip to Biloxi, MS to support Back Bay Mission.

Our first trip to support Back Bay Mission came in 2005 (pre-Katrina) through our youth group that does an annual mission trip. Then Katrina hit and one of our members, Ryan King, had graduated from the youth group and left home for college. Not only did he feel compelled to give back again, he questioned why the trip was only reserved for our youth group. This served as a catalyst for an intergenerational mission trip and this group first visited in 2006.

We have been coming down to Biloxi the first full week of January for the last 14 years.

Flash forward one year, I recently hit my one-year anniversary of joining First Church and again there was a call for interest in taking the annual trip to Biloxi in the morning announcements. I mentioned to Pastor Kate I was thinking about going on the trip and she enthusiastically said, “You absolutely need to go!” A little fearful of being one of only two newbies out of 24 people on the trip, Diana, our group leader welcomed me right away and I felt at ease right away.

I was compelled to volunteer because the bible teaches us that all Christians have different gifts from God and we are to use these gifts to serve others. It is always more blessed to give than to receive. There’s a quote that has always resonated with me and it goes like this…. “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.”

I certainly felt this last week while in Biloxi, MS. We all had different gifts and gifts we certainly didn’t know we even had. For me, I had never really used power tools and frankly they scared me. But fearless leaders at the worksite (thank you Doug and Jim), pushed me and others to overcome our fears and get the job done. I’m still in awe of how much was accomplished in just 4.5 days at the worksite. We framed an entire house minus the roof!

While others were working on the house, some of our members were helping in the food pantry, the soup kitchen, and the Micah House. Again, we all have different gifts and there was plenty of opportunity to go out of our comfort zones and give back to society.

Many times, we don’t think a lot about being generous. We are often thinking about how we can save enough money to buy the car, shoes or the phone we want. Lots of energy goes into making sure we have the latest and greatest. And while there’s nothing wrong with wanting nice things, we’ve got to keep it in the proper perspective.

Acquiring things can trap us in an endless cycle. You get something, but it doesn’t really satisfy you, so you try to obtain the next thing, and that doesn’t really make you happy, so you reach for something new. If you’re not careful, your whole life can turn into the pursuit of stuff.

True happiness comes when you put pursuing things to the side and begin living a life of generosity.
Six of us just got back from Back Bay Mission. Hayley Kuehner
and Emily Kempf led the way and 4 of us old guys followed
these two Veteran builders down to Biloxi. It was a good
trip, but also, we were the only group to work since March
and the next group might not get there until September.
People on the coast still need the help of Back Bay Mission.

I’m raising money for Back Bay Mission and your contribution
will make an impact, whether you donate $5 or $500. Every
little bit helps. I am asking anyone who has volunteered
at Back Bay Mission to contribute and to tell your story
to 2 others including parents and grandparents. You
know that Back Bay Mission is amazing. TIME TO HELP.

Everything that we do at Back Bay Mission stems from our mission:
strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, transforming lives.
We strengthen neighborhoods through nine initiatives: the Micah
Center (Day Center for the Homeless), Home at Last, (Permanent
Supportive Housing), Rental Assistance, Emergency Assistance
(Includes Food Choice Food Pantry) Community Health Worker
Project, Bridges Out of Poverty education, Housing Recovery
and Home Port (Housing for Veterans) Our programs are
seeking justice by providing a way forward for those caught in
generational poverty, those experiencing the devastation of life
traumas and those who are victims of poor life choices. These
programs assist the people we serve become contributing citizens
in their communities, An annual average of 800 volunteers take
what they learn at Back Bay Mission home with them where they
have the opportunity to strengthen their own neighborhoods
efforts in justice seeking. Justice seeking means supporting the
people we serve in becoming more involved in their communities,
educating people about the realities of poverty, and advocating
on behalf of marginalized people. All of our programs transform
lives. Whether we’re helping a homeowner keep their home,
mentoring a single mother as she plans her path out of poverty,
or working with an intern who is thinking about a career in social
work, we’re making the lives of the people we serve better. Our
work in transforming leads BBM to be catalyst in transforming
individual lives that can transform our communities and the country.
Thank you for your support.

REV. ALICE GRAHAM, PHD TO RETIRE IN 2020

It is never easy to say goodbye but with a great sense of
grateful, the Board of Directors of Back Mission announces
the retirement of Dr. Alice Graham as Executive Director. Her
last official day will be December 31, 2020. Since joining
the Mission in 2015, Dr. Graham has led a gallant effort in
meeting the needs of the under-served and enhancing the
value of the organization in the community. Her passion for
serving others is exemplary. We are excited to continue the
mission of Strengthening Neighborhoods, Seeking Justice, and
Transforming Lives with Dr. Graham through the remainder
of 2020. The Board has begun the process of identifying
candidates to advance the Mission in the future. Please join
the Board, along with Staff, as we congratulate Dr. Graham
on her upcoming retirement.

LEAD THE WAY

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.” —Nelson Mandela

What would the world look like without racism? That is a question, we
believe, that everyone needs to be asking of themselves and others. Not
only asking it, but also living it. I know the easy answer is to say there
will always be racism. But we do not want nor can we accept the easy
path. We want the righteous path, the path that Jesus took when He
“had to go through Samaria” John 4:4. We want more than the easy
answer, we want pathways that lead to a nation without racism. It will
take us being conscious of our own feelings and making a consistent
effort to change how we think and talk about fellow human beings. We
cannot stop there; we need to listen to what others are saying and be
courageous enough to say it is not acceptable when any kind of racism
is voiced. It is saying with an open and loving heart that we each need
to think out of love and respect for all. Let ourselves become aware of
our own biases that limit our capacity to love one another. It has to start
somewhere, we at Back Bay Mission (BBM) and Gulf Coast Housing
Initiative (GCHI) say it will start with us and we hope that you in your
organizations, churches, and businesses will lead the way to create non-
racist communities. Teaching love is the way to change the world one
person at a time