THE CHANGING TIDES
The Magazine of Back Bay Mission
Fall 2021

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Greetings Back Bay Mission friends! I want to take our Fall Changing Tides as an opportunity to introduce our proposed 100-Year Anniversary theme: Back Bay Mission: Making Good Trouble on the Coast for 100 Years!

“Get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America.” John Lewis made this statement on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on March 1, 2020, commemorating the tragic events of Bloody Sunday. Bloody Sunday occurred on March 7, 1965, as peaceful protesters were beaten by law enforcement officers for crossing the bridge.

Back Bay Mission has been making good trouble, necessary trouble all along the coast of Mississippi (and beyond) for 100 years.

In the 1920’s, First Evangelical (the foremothers and forefathers of Back Bay Mission and the United Church of Christ) provided spiritual education, clothing, shoes, and medical care to the children of Biloxi’s Back Bay fisher folk who immigrated to the coast from Italy, Croatia, Yugoslavia, France, and later, Vietnam. These migrants came to work in the seafood industry and make a better life for their families. In the 1920s Biloxi had become known as the seafood capital of the world with over 40 seafood factories. Back in the day, the shrimp and oyster industry offered consistent work but not a livable wage to support growing migrant families. In addition, the mission and justice driven folks who started Back Bay Mission offered classes in sewing, embroidery, craft work, and cooking to assist the early immigrants in finding alternative employment self-sufficiency.

These pioneers of justice made “good trouble” by helping to overcome the class consciousness which had formed an undesirable social, cultural, and economic division between the settled people of Biloxi and the migrants coming to find employment and a better life for their children. Strange is it not, how this story of inequities, bigotry, cultural and political division continues even to this day!

Back Bay Mission has always been a catalyst for change and social transformation and had its own bloody Sunday right here on the coast in the tradition of John Lewis “making good trouble, necessary trouble”.

In the late 50’s and early 60’s, there were 3 attempts to desegregate the 27 miles of beautiful sugar sand Mississippi Gulf beaches. The 2nd attempt, April 24, 1960, was deemed “Bloody Sunday”. The protesters were trained in non-violent passive resistance and expected to be arrested. Instead, they were violently attacked by a group of white people armed with pipes and chains as police stood by without intervening.

On June 23, 1963 – just days after the assassination of civil rights leader Medgar Evers at his home in Jackson, 71 protestors headed back to the beach for the 3rd wade in. This time, they did not just wade in but planted black flags in the sand in memory of Evers. In opposition a segregationist group of over 2000 harassed the activists but this time it was peaceful. And finally in 1968 the beaches were officially desegregated. Staff and friends of Back Bay Mission participated in the desegregation of Mississippi’s Gulf Coast Beaches. We stand on their shoulders!

Maya Angelou said: “Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can’t practice any other virtue consistently.”

It takes courage to consistently make “good trouble” and Back Bay Mission has consistently been courageous as we stand on the side of justice for those living in poverty, without shelter and basic necessities such as food, clothing, healthcare, and a voice speaking on their behalf.

Please support us during these difficult times as we seek, in the words of the old spiritual “Wade in the Water”, to “trouble the Waters” on the gulf coast. At Back Bay Mission we seek to make sure everyone has a roof over their head, nutritional food, clean clothing, a shower, dignity, and a voice that advocates on their behalf. For most of us that does not sound like “good trouble” but simply living out what it means to be a good human.

Join Back Bay Mission in “making good trouble”, necessary trouble, for the next 100 years!

Executive Director
Pastor James Pennington
GEARING UP FOR BACK BAY MISSION’S 100 ANNIVERSARY
YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

Do you have stories about Back Bay Mission? Has Back Bay Mission made a positive impact on your life? Do you have artifacts from Back Bay Mission you could share? If you said yes to any of these questions and are willing to share, please contact one of Back Bay Mission’s Development Team members. We welcome stories from guests, volunteers, supporters, past employees, current and past interns, clients, anyone that has been a part of Back Bay Mission. Help us tell Back Bay Mission’s story over the past 100 years as we look towards our next 100 years.

Back Bay Mission is now in preparations for a celebration of our 100-year anniversary and a very important Capital Campaign to start in 2022 to move us towards our next 100 years! Stay tuned to see what the future could hold for Back Bay Mission! You could be called to answer a survey, speak with a Committee Member, and to give your support to the future of the guest we serve as we pave the way to a stronger Back Bay Mission for our next 100 years!

Back Bay Mission’s Development Team:
Kevin Kotula (kkotula@thebackbaymission.org) and Laura Payne Breeland (lpayne@thebackbaymission.org).

You can give us a call at 228-432-0301 if you have any questions, would like to schedule an interview, or would like to talk about your history with Back Bay Mission.

IN HONOR OF

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Bob Myers
Carol Crowe
Claire Overlander
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First United Church of Christ
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IN 2021 DONATION TRIBUTES AS OF AUGUST

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THE CHANGING TIDES: FALL 2021
“Strengthening Neighborhoods, seeking justice, transforming lives” is our mission statement at Back Bay Mission, and for good reason. Every single person that comes onto our campus: staff member, volunteer, mission trip camper and beyond all believe in living those words through their hearts, minds and actions. No one exemplifies that better than long-time mission-trip volunteer, Jennie Schoenefeld.

A native of Plymouth, Wisconsin and member of the Salem United Church of Christ, Jennie has been coming to volunteer, a week of her time, at Back Bay Mission for over 7 years. And each trip, Jennie told me; she brings a little piece of Biloxi back with her to Wisconsin. Some years, it’s a memory of a client who has had a rough life experience that Jennie was able to help in some small way; packing a bag, being a shoulder to cry on, that sticks with Jennie on the trip back to Plymouth. The experience ringing in her head until she is able to get up and share with the rest of her congregation back home in Wisconsin. Some of the listeners’ eyes well up with tears, gripped by the details Jennie shares, and some even come up to her after to thank her for sharing. Some promise to make the trip next year, some write a check each compelled by Jennie’s week in Biloxi.

Other times, the week leads to not only memories but also ongoing friendships that continue to grow and thrive as the years pass. Jennie’s mother was a school teacher of modest means so the year Jennie came to Back Bay Mission, and heard of a retired, local school teacher who’s house needed repair, she leapt into action. Thinking of her own mother, Jennie wanted to make sure not only was the teacher’s house rebuilt but that the teacher’s spirit was also lifted and rebuilt. It is no small coincidence that Jennie left that week with a lifelong friend, Julie the former schoolteacher. To this day, each week Jennie makes a trip to Back Bay Mission and Biloxi, lunch with Julie is a must!

This past year though, something was different. Instead of just memories to treasure and stories to share with her friends back home in Wisconsin, Jennie is literally bringing home a piece of Biloxi with her. To stay. Jennie was in the middle of her week at Back Bay Mission this year when a particular sight caught her eye. Two puppies were at the Micah Day Center and needed a new home. Feeling compelled to act, Jennie and her friend Julie took the dogs to a local vet to be looked over and given the proper shots. By the time the group made it back to the Back Bay Mission campus, Jennie knew what she had to do. After calling back home to confer with family, she booked a new plane ticket for the newest member of her family, Biloxi the puppy! Every year Jennie made sure to bring home a little piece of Biloxi with her, but this year she’s bringing home a constant reminder to her and everyone around her, of Biloxi, Back Bay Mission and all the memories she’s made over the years.
When we look at the word impact, we stop to ponder what big thing did I do this month or even this week that made an impact on someone’s life. Shep Hyken reminds us, “recognize that every interaction you have is an opportunity to make a positive impact on others.” COVID for many has affected the way we interact with others, how we do business, how we see the world. I have noticed in that time since COVID time spent sitting at a table doing “normal” little daily things dwindled down greatly. Recently a mission group brought to the day center a 1000-piece puzzle and started putting the edges together-edges are an incredible thing on a puzzle its hope the rest can be completed. Slowly, some of the guests would walk by and put a piece or two. Finally, a guest Bryan was sitting around the table working steadily on this puzzle. I decided to sit with him and put a few pieces in. During this time, we had the most organic conversations. I felt a peace about him he does not normally have, he said, “it helped him focus on the task at hand and helped him keep his mind occupied.” How often do we take for granted simple things like a puzzle? I know I did. But to this individual it was communion and a purpose. My heart is overjoyed when I see things looking more normal—that we can look for small moments to sit with a guest and have a meaningful interaction….to make a positive impact. A previous group of mission trip campers were playing card games like UNO with the guests, the laughter and levity was contagious.

“Jack” came to Back Bay Mission to receive services at the Micah Day Center. He has been homeless for four months on the coast but has experienced homelessness before when he was living in northern Mississippi. He is currently staying on the streets. He does receive SSI due to a developmental disability. In conducting the needs assessment with Jack, his needs included getting his documents and ID and finding housing. I referred him to Open Doors, and I assisted him with filling out an online pre-application for the waitlist for housing with Biloxi Housing Authority. I helped Jack apply for food stamps (SNAP) and he was referred to Back Bay Mission’s food pantry for emergency food assistance. He also received a list of places to get daily meals. The next thing we discussed was the process on how to get his documents and ID. First, we started with getting a new Social Security card. With no identification he would need to get a Face Sheet from the local hospital which takes the place of an ID. He left the day center that day with the task of acquiring the Face Sheet. It took about a week to mail the documents and about a week and a half later he had a new Social Security card. Next, we contacted the local Medicaid office to request a new Medicaid card. Unfortunately, he would have to change his address with the Social Security office. We called and had his address changed so the new card would be mailed to the day center. It would take 24 hours for the information to be changed so Jack would have to come back another day to follow-up. It would be another week before Jack came back to the day center. We called the Medicaid office again and ordered his new card. He received the card about a week later and so we were ready to order his new birth certificate. Because Jack did not have an ID, he needed a Social Security and Medicaid card for verification. Next, we concentrated on getting the birth certificate. I assisted Jack with filling out the application. He will be bringing the fee of $17, and we will provide a cashier’s check to mail in with the application. As you can see, the process of getting identification can take some time and requires a lot of patience. When Jack’s birth certificate comes in the mail, he will finally be able to go to the DMV and get an ID that he will need to secure housing when it becomes available.
Hi Everyone,

We are Mark and Bonnie Westcott from Highland Illinois. We have been coming to BBM for seven years now, soon to be eight. We wanted to share our unique BBM story.

Mark came down for his first time in 2012 with our Church group. He had such a great experience that he came down the next year as well. Then, our Church decided not to come to BBM anymore but we still felt the calling to return to BBM. So, what did we do?

We called Benji and talked to him about returning without a church group. He said to come down and join another group that was already scheduled. So that’s what we did. We picked a time and joined another church group. We emailed back and forth prior to our trip. Then off we went for our first experience working with another group. It was so wonderful that we decided to continue this same experience joining groups that come down to BBM. We’ve been doing this for the past five years now. Every year we get to work with people from different churches. Last year during COVID we were the only two there. Even with that Craig kept us busy for the week. We also worked at Loaves & Fishes and the Micha Center.

For the past three years after our week of work at BBM we’ve stayed in Biloxi in a Condo for six weeks and have helped out at BBM and Loaves & Fishes. During this time, we’ve worked with lots of groups and have helped so many people along the way. We have made many new lifelong friends and have shared countless stories and experiences with them.

We are coming back again in January and will be joining two other church groups for the week. Then off to our condo for seven weeks and helping out where we can at BBM and Loaves & Fishes until we return home in March. Since we have been coming to BBM we feel like we have received so much more than we have given. The people we’ve helped and the friendships we’ve built along the way have changed our lives. As soon as we leave, we start counting down the days until we return the next year.

We wanted to share our personal story to let others know that if you want to come to BBM and don’t have a church group, give the volunteer coordinator a call and set up a time that works for you. We’re always happy to have you join us at BBM.

With God’s blessings,

Mark & Bonnie Westcott

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**VOLUNTEER CORNER**

Sandra Nimmo is Back Bay Mission’s new Micah Day Center Assistant. Sandra was born and raised in Germany. She has been living in the United States since 2007. She moved to Biloxi in 2019 with her husband Derek, who is a paralegal in the United States Air Force. Together they have two children Michelle and Chloe.

Sandra went to college at Geschwister School and graduated with her Registered Nursing degree. Sandra has worked as a preschool teacher, barista, and as a nurse. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, stained glass, and spending time with her family and friends.

Sandra always wanted to give back and Back Bay Mission was the perfect place to do so.

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**INTERNSHIPS AT BACK BAY MISSION**

An internship at Back Bay Mission offers a meaningful, practical, and professional learning experience related to a student’s field of study or career interest. The internship also offers an opportunity for career exploration. Interns bring a lot to the table that benefit Back Bay Mission and the guest we serve. Interns bring new ideas and energy into Back Bay Mission and potentially build a pipeline for future full-time employees. Back Bay Mission has built a good reputation with the local higher learning institutes to be included as a training option for their students. Many of the interns pick Back Bay Mission for the meaningful work being done in our community. Many of the interns leave pursuing jobs in social services or medical fields. Back Bay Mission has been blessed to be a place of learning and growing in more ways than one.
INTERNSHIPS AT BACK BAY MISSION

Heather Lanford

Heather Lanford completed her last internship at Back Bay Mission. Heather is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi and received her Master of Social Work at Louisiana State University. Heather started volunteering at Back Bay Mission in February 2021 to fulfill her internship requirement. Heather chose Back Bay Mission because of the impact the organization has on our community. Her goal was to develop new skills and experience working with a diverse population. She continued volunteering until she graduated in August. Heather is now working with a nonprofit organization that just so happened to start right here at Back Bay Mission in the late 1970’s.

K’Lanie Kirkiland

K’Lanie Kirkiland, OTAS is an occupational therapy student at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Perkinston campus. Miss Kirkland is currently in her second rotation of clinicals and chose to send time, on campus, at Back Bay Mission to get some hands-on experience working with people in a real-life setting. She says occupational therapy uses the value of occupation to recover and gain strength, both physically and mentally. According to Miss Kirkland, Back Bay Mission sees a lot of psychosocial clients who could directly benefit from the assistance of an occupational therapist. We wish Miss Kirkland well in her studies at MGCCC and look forward to seeing her on campus here at Back Bay Mission again in the future!

Saren McAllister

Saren McAllister is a graduate student intern from Tulane University. She graduated from Brandeis University in 2014 with a Bachelor’s Degrees in Sociology and African and Afro-American Studies. While completing her BA, Saren worked as a peer advocate for survivors of sexual assault and as a prevention educator. She also completed several internships with agencies that serve people experiencing homelessness and poverty. In order to earn her Master’s in Social Work, Saren will complete over 900 hours at the Back Bay Mission. Saren is a Gulf Coast Native and lives in Biloxi with her partner, three cats, and elderly miniature dachshund.

Leaving with Light and Joy
By Tabitha Williams, Intern

This was a first-time experience for me with community service with an outreach organization. I had only previously volunteered at blood drives. I fulfilled my community service hours at Back Bay Mission. I was informed of their services by a current employee’s daughter who is enrolled in school with me. Before this, I had never heard of the organization or its available services. I was able to learn valuable information about the program from Mr. Kenney Washington. He informed me that there were many other services than the ones visible to me. Their mission was for the overall wellbeing and continuous progress of those in the community in need of their services. They allow an opportunity for individuals to meet is not just basic care and hygiene needs. They have available food services, they allow individuals to take steps in job placement, they assist with future housing opportunities and housing essentials. The organization welcomes the community with open hearts, listening ears, communication, and counseling.

While at my community service, at Back Bay Mission, I learn how to adjust my emotions and be the helping hand that someone needed. I was in my previous placement, as a volunteer, in the food pantry and was getting ready to start the day. Mr. Kenney Washington stopped me and asked if I was available to assist in the day center instead. By doing this I would receive one of the biggest impacts on myself during my community service. While completing task needed a woman then came in with her undressed 8-month-old baby.

She had arrived to use the shower services and to give her baby a bath. Even though the center is well set up for adults who need assistance and resources it was not set up to assist with an infant. The center made sure that the woman and baby were assisted immediately and safely. While the mother and baby went in to have their shower one of the workers did her best in providing what she could. She was trying to make the best of what she had into a makeshift disposable diaper.

I then realized that my purpose by God on that day was to be in that exact spot at that exact time. I felt he was showing me a need that needed to be met. I offered my assistance to leave the premises to be able to go collect some necessities for the baby. A fellow classmate, Katie Baron, and I were fortunate enough to be able to help by supplying diapers, wipes, baby food, baby wash, a few toys, pacifiers, clothes, a diaper bag, and a bottle. We made sure that the mother would be able to carry everything in one bag along with carrying her child. This need brought such light and joy to our hearts. I am sharing my experience and gratitude for being able to volunteer with this organization. It left an ever-lasting impact and I look forward to continuing volunteering with the Back Bay Mission.