I am sure you know by now as you have been reading my reflections and watching the videos that Kevin, our Development Associate, produces that I am a huge fan of Mother Teresa.

I have asked this question many times over as I have followed the journey and life of Mother Teresa: “Where did she find the strength and perseverance to place herself completely at the service of others?” I have come to know that she was a deep, deep thinker who sought to connect with the Divine One in the silence and agony of her soul. And what made Teresa even more relevant to my own life experience was that she had doubts and struggles in her religious beliefs which lasted 50 years until the end of her life.

As I have studied Teresa, I realize she lived with great awareness. She lived with great awareness of both the beauty and ugliness of humanity. She was keenly aware that she was both human and divine and everything in between.

We just passed through Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week the third week of November. You will hear about it in this issue of The Changing Tides. What has been life-giving as of late is that there is a growing awareness on the Coast of Mississippi around the unsheltered and hungry. Ocean Springs has for the first time in its known history begun to explore the challenges of homelessness and poverty in its community. Ocean Springs is primarily a wealthy resort community just three miles east over the Biloxi Bay Bridge. Back Bay Mission has been at the table for The Ocean Springs Homeless Council that has met twice and has three sub-committees that are focusing on solutions rather than blame.

In Biloxi, we have been developing a partnership and a vision for a one-stop service-rich center for people who are unsheltered or threatened by homelessness and food insecurity. We have twelve partners already involved and the one aspect of the plan is to provide short-term overnight housing which has been an ongoing identified need for years here on the coast. We have a property identified that was the previous site of Mercy Cross High School, and we are working with the Diocese of Biloxi to secure the property for developing this one-stop center. We have the Police Chiefs, The District Redevelopment and the City Hall all involved in the discussions, and we are together raising awareness and moving forward in the planning phase of the project.

This is an amazing time of awareness and transformation. We at Back Bay Mission are building on this energy. The pandemic has helped us slow down and notice economic and racial inequities and helped us recognize the pandemic that has always been with us since the beginning of time, the pandemic of poverty, hunger and homelessness. This is our time and our place. It is our opportunity to celebrate and take advantage of this growing awareness and the energy to address poverty and inequities.

I would like to close with a powerful quote from Mother Teresa that I have often used to bring awareness and motivate hearts and minds: “Poverty doesn’t only consist of being hungry for bread, but rather it is a tremendous hunger for human dignity.”

May we all have a greater awareness for those who are hungering after human dignity. May we be the ones to bring them not only food and shelter but also the dignity that each human deserves! May we all find greater awareness in 2022.

Executive Director
Pastor James Pennington
IN MEMORY OF
MARY SUE WILSON FAIRCHILD
WALKWAY

A beautiful brick walkway will be started very soon 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. Brick orders will be taken until Friday, January 7, 2022. 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 dedication to supporting causes that improved the lives of others.

IN MEMORY OF
1990’s Back Bay Mission Staff
Kathleen Addison &
Back Bay Mission Staff
Bob and Nancy Back
Rev. Gordon L. Crouch
Renda Feller
Ilse Foster

Elizabeth Adams
Rev. Douglas Anders
Donothy Andrew
Rev. Jack Angood
Mary Elizabeth Bass Bryant
Casey
Lynn Marie Cook
Rev. J. Richard Coyle
Charles Dick
Mary Sue Fairchild

Holly Green
Betty Guhl
Rev. Dr. P.B. Kiewit
Ronald G. Kurtz 90th Birthday
Tammy Laing
Bill and Ellen Matten
Donald Morgan

IN HONOR OF
Liz Nash
New Hampshire Conference Work Teams
Rev. James Pennington
Bob and Barbara Peterson
Rev. Shari Prestemon
Albert and Patricia Salter
Sam Schroeder

Bruno and Linda Schroeder
Hank and Martha Seward
John and Pam Small
Rev. Bryn Smallwood-Garcia
Jeanette Tangeman
UCC Volunteers
United Church of Christ of New Brighton

Dan and Kathy Wackman
David Ward
Rev. Jennifer Whipple
Terry White
Richard Williams

Rev. Roger P. Felson
John Fiegel
Dr. Donald P. Flick
Isle Foster
Bill Gilbert
Ron Glenn
Patricia “Tiki” Goyette
Eugene A. Helvig
Bob Herman
Kyle Higginbotham

Kathy Hambaker
Arthur Henry Hubbard
Rev. George Hunter
Butch Knight
Thomas and Norma Laing
A. Vinton Lewis
Lloyd Leyen
Mars
Sylvia Mentel
Jane Nordwell

Barbara O’Connor
Carol Parkney
John Ray
Doris Small
Edwin Brent Smith
David Condit and Sparky Sonderregger
Edward & Alice Sonant
Rev. David Stephens
Terry Tangeman
Eleanor Trelle

Casey A. Veri
Laura Vought
Margaret Wayne
David L. Weaver Jr.
Richard T. Weikel
Esther Westermeyer
HUNGER & HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS WEEK AT BBM

The 2021 Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week was observed November 13th - 21st. This week is dedicated to promoting awareness around homelessness and food insecurities. According to the USDA’s Household Food Insecurity in the United States report, more than 38 million people in the United States experienced hunger in 2020. The National Alliance to End Homelessness reported in January 2020 that there were 580,466 people experiencing homelessness in America. Most were individuals (70%), and the rest were people living in families with children.

Back Bay Mission hosted two events during the week: Hunger Homeless Meal and the Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Walk. The first event, the 15th Annual Hunger Homeless Meal, took place on Thursday, November 18, from 11:30 am until 1:00 pm at Back Bay Mission. The meal was a traditional Thanksgiving meal that included turkey, yams, green bean casserole, stuffing, cranberry sauce, rolls, a drink, and a slice of pie. Hard Rock handled cooking, boxing, transporting, and serving the meals. Back Bay Mission provided the space and promoted the event to those who were in need. This year, 200 meals were handed out. Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Biloxi, under the leadership of Twin River Management Group, started providing a Thanksgiving meal for the homeless and hungry in 2007. This tradition continues to be a day of happiness not hardship for many of the participants. We thank Hard Rock Hotel & Casino for their commitment to our community.

The second event held to promote Hunger and Homelessness Awareness was Back Bay Mission’s first Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Walk. The walk was held on Saturday, November 20th. Participants could walk in-person at Point Cadet in Biloxi or virtually. This was a fun walk to help raise awareness of the hardships our neighbors deal with on a day-to-day basis. Next year, we look forward to our 100 Year Anniversary Bike, Run, & Walk scheduled for Saturday, November 12, 2022. This will be our 100 Miles for a 100 Years commemorative event! Mark your calendars well in advance. More information will be shared as we get closer to that date!

We would like to thank our sponsors of the Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Walk: Scarlet Pearl Casino Resort, Keesler Federal Credit Union, Knight Abbey, Memorial, Ocean Springs Coca-Cola Bottling Company, Humana, Women’s Club of Gulfport, and all those who participated. A big thank you to Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Biloxi for providing the Hunger Homeless Meal again for the 15th year. We also need to thank our local news stations, WLOX and WXXV, for providing information and coverage for each of these events.
When we think of Back Bay Mission and the civil rights movement, we tend to remember the big episodes: the Wade-In, the broken glass, the cross burning. But the Mission was involved in the movement before then. The Mission’s work for racial justice began with Rev. Richard Ellerbrake, the pastor of St. Paul’s Church (’58-’60) and director of Back Bay Mission from 1958 to 1962.

While Rev. Ellerbrake was already secretary of the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, our involvement with the civil rights movement surged with a letter that Rev. Ellerbrake wrote.

In 1960, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission gave a grant of $20,000 (about $187,600 in 2021 dollars) to the White Citizens’ Council. Both were white supremacist anti-integration groups: one public (the State Sovereignty Commission) and one private (the White Citizens’ Council). Rev. Ellerbrake wrote a letter to the head of the Sovereignty Commission (with a copy to the Biloxi Daily Herald) protesting this grant, writing:

I cannot protest too strongly this action, which is a flagrant violation of the democratic principle that public funds are to be used only for that which is in the best interest of the public.

Roughly half of Mississippi’s “public” are colored citizens. I doubt they approve such an expenditure; nor do many intelligent white citizens… [T]his action is not only extra-constitutional, but immoral as well: in other words, wrong.

The response that Rev. Ellerbrake received was immediate and blood-curdling. One letter from a “Red Blooded & All White” citizen called him a “mongrel minded so called preacher” and a “spineless, yellow blooded preacher.” Another, from “A dyed-in-the-wool Mississippian, living in Tennessee by misfortune,” told him to “go back to wherever you came from - or maybe to Africa,” and accused him of being “brainwashed by the communists.” Finally, a letter from a member of the Commission accused him of having “leanings to nefarious Communistic Organizations” such as the NAACP. According to Rev. Ellerbrake, he received an equal number of letters praising his stand and “chewing [him] out.”

Over the next several years, as secretary of the Mississippi Advisory Committee, Rev. Ellerbrake attended meetings (always held on federal property). He was often accompanied by Rev. Jack Aregood, the Director of Christian Education (later pastor) at St. Paul’s Back Bay Church. And, of course, Rev. Ellerbrake’s wife Johann was also involved. Threatening phone calls were a regular part of life, including calls threatening Johann and the Ellerbrakes’ son. “The ringing of phone,” recalls Johann “was a very, very threatening thing.”

Rev. Ellerbrake’s work included not only meetings with the Mississippi Advisory Committee and letters to the State Sovereignty Commission, but taking summer volunteers around the state to meet people, from Medgar Evers to sharecroppers, and hear their stories. Providing high school and college workers with an education about race in Mississippi was an important part of our mission. It also included the Mission’s first integrated activities, partnering with Main Street Baptist Church to offer their young people cooking classes, a library, a wrestling club, and other activities. That made the Mission one of two non-governmental integrated organizations in Mississippi (the other being Tougaloo College).

This work that Rev. Ellerbrake began continued after he left in 1962. But the seed for the big stories we often tell began with a letter protesting the unfair and unjust action of the State Sovereignty Commission and the statement that their actions were “not only extra-constitutional, but immoral as well: in other words, wrong.”
When I think back over the four years I have worked at Back Bay Mission, and the countless faces and people I have met and been a part of their lives in some capacity, I think of so many people. So many of these people never leave my mind; they are part of my story, too. I can think back to four years ago and remember all the moments along the way that help tell a story.

This story is about a guest I met during COVID two years ago. He came in, as so many do, in a time when there was such uncertainty in the world…but he was healthy, happy, and hopeful. He would even attend our Bible studies here at Back Bay. We would speak often and regularly. I remember when his joy started to turn to pain about a year ago. He was complaining of stomach pain regularly, having a hard time eating food, and a little of that man I met two years ago started to fade out to pain. This all came to a head around July of 2021. He was so weak he could no longer walk. We forced him to go to the hospital. Here is the thing you don’t know about this person: you probably drove 100 times past on Division Street: you wouldn’t know his pain because you didn’t know him. We knew, though; the staff could see it.

The thing about this world is, it’s often surrounded by people who are all alone. The little prince said, “Where are the people? It’s a little lonely in the desert…” “It is lonely when you’re among people, too,” said the snake. This man was alone in this desert: no living family, no friends. Just the people here at Back Bay who would keep trying to find new ways to help a man so clearly dying. In August, it became clear what was happening: after a trip to the emergency room, he would find out he had cancer—pancreatic cancer. We knew that we had to act quickly; time was important. He was living on a dock with no real food, in agonizing pain. Within one week, we had him housed and with resources at a local hospital that would see him for his cancer, with no insurance and no social security.

I remember he looked at me and told me he was so full of hope, that whatever it was, it was going to do it because he wanted to live. Yet one month to the day from the day he was housed, we found him passed away in his apartment. That’s how long he had had a modicum of peace. A place to lay down that was soft at night, so his thin frail body wasn’t in pain from the wooden slats of the dock he was living on. One month of building his home. He got a TV, put up pictures, made crosses for the walls...he was home.

In that month, we had many frustrations that I won’t talk about today, because this story isn’t about the deficiencies; it’s about standing in the gaps. I like to remember not the passing, but the light in his eyes when he moved into his apartment; when he told everyone I was his advocate; when we would sit at his kitchen table doing crossword puzzles and talking. I remember the Bible studies while we waited at pharmacies, the joy he brought to my life, and the earrings he bought my daughters because he was kind.

His story will make changes, because when a system is so broken by standing in the gaps, we highlight the issues we work to make change. This death for me has been a call to action. Not just his death, though: also all those faces we see daily, all those lives we touch everyday just by opening our doors and saying, “good morning, how are you?”

So, to leave you with another Little Prince quote, to remind us that we just have to take the time to find one rose or provide the water; it’s not about always making systemic changes...just meaningful changes every day.

“People where you live,” the little prince said, “grow five thousand roses in one garden... yet they don’t find what they’re looking for…”

“They don’t find it,” I answered.

“And yet what they’re looking for could be found in a single rose, or a little water…”

“Of course,” I answered.

And the little prince added, “But eyes are blind. You have to look with the heart.”
Please give a warm welcome to Back Bay Mission’s two newest staff members in the Micah Day Center, Daniel Caridad and Sandra Nimmo. We are so excited to have them and appreciate what all they do for our guests and Back Bay Mission!

Daniel Caridad | Day Center Coordinator

Daniel has a Bachelors of Science in Psychology from The University of Southern Mississippi, specializing in cognitive theory, the psychology of marketing, and behavioral modification. He is a lifetime member of both Psi Chi and Sigma Tau Delta, international honor societies in Psychology and English Literature, respectively. Daniel is also a proud member of N.A.M.I. (National Alliance for Mental Illness).

Daniel resides as far south as you can go without getting your shoes wet. The original tiny traveler, he had two passports in his name before his first steps. Daniel plays guitar, drums, a little piano, and is working toward being the Gulf Coast’s preeminent blues ukulele practitioner. One day, he hopes to earn his PsyD/Ph.D. in counseling psychology. Daniel has previously served the community as a Senior Psychiatric Technician, Case Manager, Program Coordinator, Workforce/GED educator, and Emergency Room Technician.

Sandra Nimmo | Day Center Assistant

Sandra Nimmo is the 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 Geshwister 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 & friends. Sandra always wanted to give back and Back Bay Mission is the perfect place to do so.

INCUBATOR FOR NONPROFITS

Back Bay Mission’s history includes being an incubator for many organizations whose services are centered around the needs of the most vulnerable of the population. The most recent include:

- Coastal Family Health Center promotes healthy communities by providing accessible, quality primary healthcare services to all persons regardless of economic status. We accomplish this with competent and caring staffs who work to meet and exceed expected standards for care and customer satisfaction.

- Gulf Coast Center for Nonviolence (Formally the Gulf Coast Women’s Center) began its long history of providing shelter to victims of domestic violence. During the past 30 years, the Center has developed into a comprehensive array of services for adult and child victims of violence: domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, and family members of homicide victims.

- South MS AIDS Task Force educates the public about the prevention and transmission of HIV/AIDS while providing services to those affected.

- Loaves and Fishes: Community kitchen feeding the hungry and homeless.

- Open Doors Homeless Coalition is a coalition raising awareness by building bridges within the community and acting as a unified force dedicated to reducing and preventing homelessness.

- Gulf Coast Housing Initiative (GCHI) provides affordable, safe and dignified housing opportunities and services to low- and moderate-income individuals and families on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

- Harrison County Head Start Program promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

A NOTE ON END OF YEAR GIFTS

As the end of the year approaches, you’re probably thinking about your next gift to Back Bay Mission. We want to share some important information - especially important if you want to claim your gift on your taxes for this year - about the end of year gifts to the Mission.

If you’re mailing your gift to Back Bay Mission, it must be postmarked by December 31, 2021. Gifts postmarked after that date will be counted for 2021. Please mail your gifts to Back Bay Mission, PO Box 288, Biloxi, MS 39533.

If you’re making your gift on our website or APP, you must make the gift by 11:59 pm central time on December 31, 2021. You can make your gift at thebackbaymission.org/give.

Thank you for strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, and transforming lives through your gifts to Back Bay Mission!