

The View from Mississippi

*December 2006: An update from Shari Presetemon
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In Mississippi, disaster recovery work continues. Along the seventy-five mile coastline of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, over 130,000 homes were either completely obliterated or extensively damaged, in a population area of approximately 450,000 persons (pre-Katrina). Today, nearly 100,000 individuals remain in FEMA trailers in Mississippi and almost no new housing construction is taking place. Holistic redevelopment of devastated neighborhoods remains largely stagnant, stalled by a mix of complex issues that include new building elevation requirements, extreme land speculation, delayed insurance recoveries and the steeply rising costs of property insurance moving forward, and continued confusion and limited vision on the part of local municipalities. The future of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, particularly for the area's poorest and most vulnerable persons, is very unclear.



Back Bay Mission, a community ministry of the United Church of Christ located in Biloxi, Mississippi, remains a locus of disaster recovery efforts for the United Church of Christ in Mississippi. UCC members nationwide have joined Back Bay Mission in housing recovery efforts in Biloxi and Gulfport aimed at getting low-income homeowners back into their homes. Groups working through BBM take a project from start to finish, doing everything from dry walling to installing flooring and cabinets. Longer term volunteers assist with similar housing recovery work and volunteer coordination tasks.

Back Bay Mission also aids disaster recovery along the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the following ways: emergency assistance and case management for low-income residents; outreach to displaced and homeless persons; intensive community organizing and advocacy work on affordable housing and community redevelopment issues. Several collaborative approaches to such issues have been initiated by this UCC-related agency, which is itself preparing to be an affordable housing developer for the first time in its history.