

## [Hurricane Update] News from Back Bay Mission in Biloxi

Sept. 9, 2005

*A message from Shari Prestemon, Executive Director of Back Bay Mission, a community ministry of the United Church of Christ, in Biloxi, Mississippi.*

Dear friends:

More days have passed, and I know you continue to wonder about the fate of Back Bay Mission, its staff, clients, and friends. These last days have been packed with phone calls, emails, conference calls and strategizing sessions, all aimed at working to get Back Bay Mission up and running once again, that we may serve a community which now needs us more than ever.

Progress is slow, for there are so many obstacles to overcome. Our priority items right now are to ensure that our staff are supported, especially those who lost everything to the storm, and to find a way to house that staff and our ministry. The staff will gather face to face for the first time since the storm on Sunday afternoon, and we are anxious for that meeting. We are a small and close-knit staff, and I feel certain that our support of each other will lift spirits and move us toward the future. For the moment, Back Bay Mission operations will run out of my home in Ocean Springs (tel. #228-875-3216), but we are working to find other options. Our hope would be to place a combination of RV's, trailers, and modular homes on our existing BBM property out of which to work and serve. The people know where to find us there, and that location is still the right location for these new challenges. We are hunting for ways to make this happen, and already the Spirit is moving and showing us the way as people and congregations and other organizations offer to help us re-establish.

Our Board of Directors is having a flurry of meetings in the next few weeks to work together on all the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. We are also working intensively with the national setting of the United Church of Christ, especially the Wider Church Ministries Global Sharing of Resources and National Disaster Ministries offices, as well as the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries personnel of the UCC. All have been supportive, compassionate, and concretely helpful in ways that make a huge difference in our now chaotic lives.

In terms of previously planned events, etc. that you may have been part of, let me offer a summary of where we are now:

1) Shrimp Boils in OH and St. Louis: Cancelled.

2) Shrimp Sales in Connecticut, Wisconsin, Ohio, Iowa, and Illinois: Cancelled.

3) Workcamps: Since we have lost all our records, we have no knowledge of any workcamps scheduled for the next year. If you had a scheduled workcamp anytime in the next year, please contact Don Morgan at [dmorgan@datasync.com](mailto:dmorgan@datasync.com) with the following information ASAP. Give us your group/congregation's name, contact person, address, telephone, and email information, as well as the date for which you were scheduled. We will be in touch with you about when we can once again receive work teams. But know that for the moment, we can not receive any work groups, due to the fact that we have no way to accommodate groups. We are also working on solutions to this problem, knowing that work teams are needed and will be needed. Be patient with us. We'll get back to you.

One last note: We have recently been told that the postal service will not be operational again for quite some time. Therefore, we need to give you new instructions for making financial gifts to us.

The national setting of the UCC has graciously agreed to receive all gifts designated for BBM, and to wire transfer those on to us as that becomes logistically possible. Make your checks payable to Wider Church Ministries, and designate BBM in the memo line. Then send your gifts to: Back Bay Mission; c/o Wider Church Ministries; 700 Prospect Avenue E; Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. We thank you in advance for any support you can offer during this unprecedented time.

You may have noticed a certain assumption that underlies everything else I've said: Back Bay Mission will live and serve again. The overwhelming response of the wider United Church of Christ to our plight has convinced us that we can do no other. We are so grateful to you for your love, prayers, and assistance. And we are grateful for the strength of God and the movement of the Spirit during this very trying time. God's presence has been evident everywhere and in all of you.

Many, many thanks,

Rev. Shari Prestemon, Executive Director