

“ UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE,
THSE WHO BUILD IT LABOR IN VAIN. “ Psalm127:2

Recovery volunteers moved their energies around the rooms of a 102 year old mansion. This historic site was being restored five years after Hurricane Katrina. Our group of people came from the United Church of Christ Churches of Athens, Colby, Cable, ~~Delta~~, Wausau, and Bloomer. Plastering wall seams and nail heads, sanding, and priming walls for painting kept everybody hustling as ladders and scaffolds were moved to our aid.

A week at Back Bay Mission is always an uplifting experience. Everybody comes to join with their hearts and minds determined to give our best help to the cause. It is service to the less fortunate whom God leads us to to give new hope for their situations. His miracles appear daily. We are humbled by the lives we touch.

Here's a look at a typical work week you do when joining a Back Bay Mission Trip. You're required to pack work clothes and toiletries, a sleeping bag and towels for the week. You settle into the dorms housing bunk beds and showers. You do have kitchen privileges. Meals are shared and lunches are packed each day for the work site.

We begin with a general orientation on Monday morning, reminders of safety instructions, updates on recovery and an overall view of the expectation of the jobs ahead. The work hours begin by 8:30 - 4pm. Of course, we have break times.

Other work activities include working at the food pantry and the Micah Center where the homeless folks come to use the services there. The soup kitchen wasn't an option this year as a new director took over and it's now operating successfully with the community providing their own volunteers.

Listen to this story of how the food pantry got started. This story was written up in the Back Bay Mission THE CHANGING TIDES magazine 2010.

Jill Cartledge, Emergency Caseworker, felt frustrated when she surveyed the Food Pantry and found the shelves almost empty.

What to do? she wondered.

So many people were coming to the Mission requesting food that little was left and Cartledge was anxious about how she would meet the need. The economy had worsened and unemployment had risen.

At a luncheon honoring another Mission employee, Cartledge spotted a local TV reporter who had done a story on Back Bay Mission's distribution of Christmas food boxes. Cartledge told the reporter of her dilemma, the reporter went back to the station, told the news director about it, and the evening anchorman was dispatched to do the story.

But they were totally unprepared for what happened next. The heavens seemed to open and food rained down. The telephone rang incessantly as people called to inquire about how they could help. Vehicle after vehicle pulled up to the pantry door with fresh

meat, canned goods, packaged non-perishables, a superabundance of almost everything edible imaginable. The refrigerator filled up, the freezer filled up, the shelves were stocked and still the food poured in.

The reporter came back to do a second story on the response of the first.

“Every time you think you can see the best a community can do,” says Cartledge, they raise the bar a million fold.”

Jesus tells us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the widows and orphans.

Next to the food pantry stands the Micah Center - a day center for the homeless men and women. Here the homeless are offered a place to shower, have their laundry done, receive mail, use a computer for a job search, and take advantage of other services offered by various agencies. It's not really a shelter, but it offers them a day time place to come in and have coffee and conversation and take advantage of the opportunities. The hours are 9-3:30.

As a volunteer at the Micah Center, you wipe down the shower stalls and sink areas with bleach water after showers are taken. The showers are limited to 15 minutes. At 10 minutes you knock on the shower door telling them there is 5 minutes left. About 15 to 20 showers are taken on a daily basis.

These homeless carry their life belongings on them either in a bag or a backpack. The clothes we wash for them are put out on a table with a number they are given and the days date,. The center is open Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays, and they come in to pick up their clean clothes at their convenience,.

We don't ask about their homelessness. Some will tell you as you sip coffee with them. Others won't. We are God's messengers giving them dignity and respect and showing HIS LOVE above all else. We simply befriend them.

The heart of Back Bay Mission trips is the words of Micah -
To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. We come because we want to serve in God's name and give Him the glory by our faithfulness to serve the poor and marginalized. If you've never joined in a Bay Back Mission Trip, it's time you did.