

# OIL SPILL UPDATE

## INTRODUCTION

As the Back Bay Mission Volunteer Development Associate for WRA/EOA, I just received the following update from BBM Executive Director Share Prestemon on the oil spill and the devastating affect it is now having on the coastal communities. I am asking the churches of EOA/WRA to put place BBM and those affected by the spill on your churches prayer lists. Share this update with the members of your congregation via your newsletter and/or website.

Thank you for your prayers and support.

Doyle A. Luckenbaugh

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### *June 24, 2010*

Day 58. It had been 58 days since the Deepwater Horizon oil rig had malfunctioned, creating what we now know to be the largest technological disaster this country has ever seen. We were clustered together on an oppressively hot day near one of the docks along the Back Bay of Biloxi. Vietnamese American fishing families from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama had gathered us to hear their concerns. One woman rose from her seat to share her family's story. Her body shaking visibly with nervousness, she told us about the shrimping boat she and her husband owned, the money they had invested in it to prepare for the shrimp season, the debt they owe on it. As she described what is for her family an absolute way of life now deeply threatened, her voice would occasionally give out in paralyzing fear, but the crowd urged her on with shouts of support, nodding their understanding of a disaster made personal.

Just behind me near the back of the crowd was another man straining to tell his story. Dressed in a worn t-shirt and shorts, his feet clad in those tell-tale white boots of shrimpers everywhere, his body was taut with barely repressed anger and frustration. As sweat poured down his forehead, he shouted out, "Let me get up there! Let me tell my story!" This was his disaster too, a man who'd made his life on the waters, a man helpless to change the devastating circumstances that turned his world inside out.

Day after day now, it is these faces and these stories that characterize this disaster. And it is not just shrimpers and oystermen and crabbers, but also the fishing boat captains and deckhands, the seafood restaurant owners and workers, the hotel maids, and bait suppliers. The impact of the oil gush on the economy of the Coast is being felt far and wide. According to a study done by the University of South Mississippi:

- Recreational fishing is down over 90% since the oil spill
- Sales of those who supply boats, bait, ice, fuel and other supplies fell 70%
- Non-casino hotels have seen a 50% drop

- Seafood restaurant sales are down 30%; prices are up 30%
- The tourism industry in the three Coast counties lost \$26.9 million in May

Yesterday brought the unwelcome news that oil was washing for the first time into the Mississippi Sound, that narrow strip of water between our barrier islands and the white sand beaches. The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality now predicts that this oil will likely make landfall on mainland beaches within the next few days. Hundreds of workers trained to perform beach cleanup now do “maneuvers” on our beaches, ‘practicing’ the tasks that they’ll soon be required to perform as virtual armies on our sands.

The rest of the community makes ready too. Meetings of all kinds can easily consume one’s time as multiple federal, state, and local agencies try to get a handle on a disaster that in many ways still eludes them all. There is, after all, little we can actually do. The oil is still spewing. The full impact is still unfolding. The timeline on recovery is completely unknown. As terrible as Hurricane Katrina was ---and it was awful --- at least after it was over we knew, basically, what to do: dry out, clean up the debris, rebuild. This disaster devastates and yet remains somehow out of reach. Day after day it continues to do more damage, seemingly unstoppable, moving and taunting with the currents and the winds.

Please pray for those for whom this disaster is very personal. Pray for those who are striving each day to stop the oil from spewing. Pray for those who are crafting strategies for recovery, and those, like Back Bay Mission, who will simply care for those who’ve been harmed. Your prayers and your support are precious to us.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shari K. Prestemon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Shari Prestemon, Executive Director