

At Back Bay Church, military families prepped for missions

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

Back Bay Church in Ocean Springs has developed a special ministry that focuses on military families, particularly the ones from nearby Keesler Air Force Base.

“I never thought I’d be a church planter,” said lead pastor Adam Bennett. “Our association [Gulf Coast Baptist Association] approached me about planting a church. I agreed, and went through the church planting training at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. We were funded and planted Back Bay Church in 2018.”

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Adam Bennett, wife Becky, and son Jacob

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“I learned about church planting in a military context,” Bennett said. “I started praying, and the Lord just started sending more military families.”

Bennet is a Mississippi Gulf Coast native and has been in full-time ministry since 2005. He served two years with Campus Crusade for Christ at Mississippi State University in Starkville, where he also earned his undergraduate degree.

He holds a master of divinity degree from Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. For eleven years, he served as one of the pastors at Bayou View Church, Gulfport. He was recently recognized by Baptist Press for configuring Back Bay Church to accept cryptocurrency.

The bumpy ride through the COVID-19 pandemic that affected so many churches in Mississippi was weathered quite well at Back Bay Church.

“We were about 18 months in when COVID happened, but the Lord was good to us. We actually grew by about 50%. We were going to have a huge new location launch on March 15 of 2020, and that’s the Sunday the whole world told us to shut down.

“We lost about 15 people out of 40. I thought we were going to have to start all over. What I didn’t know was during that lockdown, people were watching us online. We came back in June and we’d grown because of that. Part of that was due to Megan.”



Brown

Megan Brown, a member at Back Bay Church, is an au

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Brown is the author of *Summoned: Answering a Call to the Impossible*, released by Moody Publishers. She is the managing editor at Moody for *Brave Women*, which recently released *Strong Faith*, an anthology written by military women and wives.

Brown and her family found themselves in need of a church home while her husband was on deployment with his military unit. "I just needed a place to land, just to regather and rethink," she said.

She and her family visited Back Bay Church in the fall of 2020, and soon heeded the Lord's leading to join that fellowship of Believers.

Both Bennett and Brown have felt called to minister to the military community and are strategically reaching into that community. "We're 60% to 70% active military, along with another 15% who are veterans or otherwise military connected," Bennett said.

"I knew she had a military spouse ministry so I started engaging her, asking some questions, and she got more involved," Bennett recalled. "In that time, we had more [military] families walk into our church and even though we didn't have a specific strategy, I encouraged them to come."

Brown believes the military community is one of the best missions-sending organizations because they're stationed around the world and accustomed to a "trenches lifestyle."

"Inside the military spouse community, we already fundamentally understand service and sacrifice, mission, and the cost of mission. If you give the Gospel to this community, we'll have a measurable Kingdom impact," Brown said.

“When I started in ministry, I started leading a small group of women in my living room. We didn’t have workbooks or supplements or anything. We were going through Luke, verse by verse. This was at Keesler in 2014. It was a handful of women in the neighborhood, ages 18 through 55.

“The next week we had 17 [in attendance], the next week 25, and before I knew it I was looking out my military housing window and there were women dragging up red wagons and lawn chairs, looking for access points to understand what the Christian faith was all about.

“We ended up asking the chaplain for meeting space, and by then we had 50 women and 50 kids. We trained women from that group how to go into homes. Now we have hundreds of groups meeting all over the globe.

“All from a transient community that won’t be here that long,” Brown pointed out. “That’s a powerful message.”

Bennett agreed that they want to leverage the mobility of military families to spread the Gospel wherever they’re stationed. “These families and these women are moved from place to place all over the world.

“If we can equip them with the Gospel, theological training, and the ability and passion to share the Gospel, can you imagine planting churches outside of military bases and reaching the [local] population?”

Johnny Ervin is director of the Church Planting/Revitalization Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, which provides resources for church plants like Back Bay Church.

“One of the more creative church planters I know is Adam Bennett,” he said.

“Adam is a classic missionary operating in a 2022 world. He knows his mission field, who needs help, and the ways his

church can help them. He knows how to love people in this mission field with the Gospel.

“A result of Adam’s work is that Back Bay Church is growing, not just in the numbers attending but also in the spiritual lives of the people who attend. Thank you Adam for serving your community well with the love of Jesus” Ervin said.

Editor’s note: Mississippi Baptists support church planting efforts through gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program.