

Victims of hurricane's fury lost as to next steps to take

OAK ISLAND, Texas – The first day Cathy Tran arrived back on Oak Island after Hurricane Ike forced her to leave, she slept on the floor of her home. All she had was a floor – no roof, no walls, no possessions.

Her home was destroyed by the storm surge, possessions thrown around by the tide and waves. Others residents Tran knew in her neighborhood slept on the ground where their homes used to be, attacked by the mosquitoes that swarm the area.

Things are a little better for the Magana family – they have walls. They're the walls of a tent on a driveway.

When the Magana family arrived back two days after the Sept. 13 storm, they found most of their home was left where it had been – and someone else's home was there as well. A neighbor's house was destroyed and parts of it were against the Maganas' home – and someone's roof had landed on the truck they left behind.

Now they live in a tent in their driveway, spending their days cleaning up their property, moving items from other people's homes that landed in their yard out to the road to be picked up by trucks hauling away the debris.

It was stories such as these that Bishop Curtis J. Guillory of Beaumont listened to as he visited with the residents of Oak Island Oct. 2; many of them are members of Our Lady of Light Parish in Anahuac.

Bishop Guillory spent time in the Oak Island area – a rural fishing community about 10 miles south of Anahuac on Trinity Bay. It's a community where Vietnamese, Spanish and English are all spoken and the main industry comes from the water – fish, shrimp, crabs and oysters. About 95 percent of the homes in the community were destroyed by Ike's surge or winds.

At the recovery center at the Baptist church on Oak Island, Bishop Guillory spoke to a number of people living in the area.

Ms. Tran told him her story of how she came back and found she had nothing. But what bothered her most was she had left the ashes of her late husband and son in her home. She searched, and cried when she could not find them. After a couple of days she got a feeling she should look down a particular alley and when she did, she said, she found the ashes.

A member of the parish council at Our Lady of Light, Ms. Tran said she spent several nights moving from place to place to sleep but now has settled in a friend's home that was not destroyed.

"It's hard for us," she said, "but we're getting tents, food, things we need."

Bishop Guillory drove through the neighborhoods, stopping and visiting, with one of those stops at the Magana family's home.

Maria and Rodrigo Magana lived with their four children ages 1 to 10 in a mobile home raised off the ground because of the possibility of flooding on the Trinity Bay coast. Now they're housed in two tents on their driveway.

The home flooded from the storm surge and from rain when the roof was ripped off part of the house. Most of their possessions were destroyed by the incoming water.

Maria Magana, talking through an interpreter, said they have their bedrooms, but no mattresses to sleep on. And to get to the house one has to climb an 8-foot ladder because the stairs leading to the porch were washed away.

The Magana family received help with cleaning from the youth group at Cristo Rey Parish in Beaumont, which they said they greatly appreciated since Rodrigo Magana has had surgery, is disabled and cannot pick up and move heavy items.