

# MISSION MOMENT: BUILDING MORE THAN HOUSES

Nearly 20 years ago, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina made an indelible mark on the city of New Orleans and her people. The storm shed light on the overwhelming vulnerabilities within structural systems that disproportionately affect marginalized persons, particularly Black and brown communities, and indigenous tribes and lands. In the decades since the catastrophic 2005 hurricane season, communities across southeast Louisiana remain disconnected from structures that could and should provide assistance and resources.

Following Hurricane Ida (2021), the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe, an indigenous community in the Terrebonne Basin, has received program and long-term recovery support from Week of Compassion. Pointe-au-Chien is a 'repeat impact community,' not only in the path of multiple massive storms, but also often overlooked and disconnected through ongoing disenfranchisement, the effects of climate change, and industrial impact and disinvestment. But unlike many in Louisiana, the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe is not in a tourist-popular area, does not receive significant media attention, and is not easily accessed.

"We were trappers, when there were animals on the land," tribal elder, wisdom-keeper, and living library Theresa says. "When the plantations came and the animals left, we harvested sugar cane. When the land receded and the water came closer, we used our traps to catch crabs and our boats to bring in shrimp and oysters. Most of the tribe are fishermen, or work on tugboats. Our ancestors didn't know where their next meal was coming from unless they went to catch it. And they didn't have a way to keep it, so they had to share it. You always plan for tomorrow but you have to live today, one day at a time."

The adaptability and resilience of the ancestors has held fast through the generations, and infuses the Pointe-au-Chien community to this day, deepening their resolve as they continue to emerge from the devastation of Hurricane



Ida. The majority of the 70+ homes in Pointe-au-Chien were either entirely destroyed or deemed unlivable.

Pointe-au-Chien, which is not a federally recognized tribe, receives little to no federal or state assistance, even in emergency, and the traditionally assigned case management had no local ties or indigenous relationships. The Lowlander Center and the First Peoples Conservation Council proposed a creative solution, which Week of Compassion eagerly supports: training tribal elders, those already trusted in the community, and employing them as case managers, resulting in greater access to available resources for long-term recovery.

In 2023, two years after the storm, collaborative recovery and home rebuilds were finally underway. Week of Compassion supported the upgrades and repairs to volunteer housing, enabling ecumenical partners to commit teams for several months and complete multiple builds.

Asked quite often, 'How do you keep doing this? Why do you stay?', Theresa offers the wisdom that only an elder can: "We aren't just rebuilding houses, we're building a strong community. The tribe has led in recovering the cultural integrity, the ecosystem, and the canal structure. We are the stewards of the land, water, and air. I pray every day that no one is impacted by hurricanes. It seemed she was speaking of more than wind and rain, but about the lasting effects of exploitation and oppression. This elder prays for her people and those like them, that they would be spared greater impact.

Week of Compassion continues to pursue the things that make for hope and peace – things that are true, honorable, and just. We eagerly share stories of hope, telling of what we have HEARD AND SEEN. Week of Compassion is committed to exploring ways to honor the lived experience of disaster-impacted communities, accompanying our neighbors and serving together with passion, resilience, and hope.

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*This Mission Moment is reprinted in part from Week of Compassion's update "Week of Compassion Board of Stewards Meets in New Orleans", November 19 2024.*