

## From grief to giving, one man finds purpose by doing ‘one more thing’

### Advisory board member finds a new avenue of service.

“It feels good to give,” said Ricky Pennington, a Salvation Army Torrance (California) Advisory Board member and self-described jack-of-all-trades.

Pennington finds purpose in helping others—whether in his Southern California community or across the country after a disaster. Most recently, he volunteered in Kerrville, Texas, following the devastating July 4 floods.



His job as an independent insurance agent allows him the freedom to volunteer. Regardless of distance, he sets out in his Tesla Cybertruck—equipped to navigate floodwaters and haul logs—to offer assistance.

In Kerrville, he worked alongside The Salvation Army’s disaster response team for the first time.

“I came away from Kerrville with a better understanding of the scope of The Salvation Army,” he said. “I was extremely impressed with the Texas disaster team.”

And the Texas team was impressed with him.

“Ricky was an incredible help,” said Texas Divisional Communications Director Philip Burn. “He jumped right in, helping to receive and organize in-kind donations for distribution to individuals and families. His volunteer spirit and servant heart were evident in all he did—working long days in the sweltering Texas heat and humidity.”

Burn said Pennington stayed at The Salvation Army shelter and made himself available in any capacity needed.

“If I can inspire someone to do just one more thing—whatever that means at the level they’re already giving—then it’s worth it.”

*Ricky Pennington*

Kerrville wasn't Pennington's first time volunteering after a disaster. In 2024, after Hurricane Helene, he drove to Asheville, North Carolina, where he helped manage a supplies distribution center through a local church.

That's when he first learned there was a term for people like him: "spontaneous volunteers"—individuals who show up to help in the wake of disaster without formal training or affiliation.

"I realized then that I could have been a little more productive," Pennington said. "They want you to be connected. I lucked into helping people because I connected with a church."

He didn't realize he was already connected.

Relatively new to the advisory board, he understood The Salvation Army's community work but not the extent of its [Emergency/Disaster Services](#) (EDS). After Asheville, he did.

"Ricky has been a dedicated board member for just over two years, consistently bringing a spirit of service and a 'let's get it done' attitude to every project," said Torrance Corps Officer Major Timothy Smith. "He loves to see action and never hesitates to roll up his sleeves."

Pennington currently serves on three advisory board committees: facilities, bellringing and board development. Recently, he installed a new air conditioning unit at The Salvation Army [Stillman Sawyer Center](#)—essential to preserving the food in its pantry.

"He often reminds others that service begins with simply stepping out the door," Smith said. "Ricky models this through his leadership on our board, his involvement with the Torrance Kiwanis, his service on the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast committee, and his hands-on presence wherever people are in need. His commitment is an inspiring example of servant leadership in action."



Courtesy Ricky Pennington.

Pennington traces his motivation to help back to what he calls “direct encounters with God.”

The first came after the death of his daughter, born with cystic fibrosis, who lived just 12 days in intensive care. Facing uncertainty, Pennington and his wife prayed, asking God to either spare her from brain damage or take her peacefully.

“We got down on our hands and knees and prayed,” he said. “Within a minute, I got a phone call that she had passed.”

He calls it his first answered prayer—his first miracle.

“I’ve seen the power of God personally,” he said.

Years later, while cliff diving in Hawaii, he broke his back and was stranded, clinging to a rope ladder above crashing waves, unable to climb to safety. He prayed again—this time for strength to survive.

“Literally, as soon as I made that prayer, it was answered,” he said. “I just walked up like you would any ladder.”

He said he still lives with some back pain but considers it a daily reminder of the promise he made that day: to help others, every day.

In Kerrville, Pennington gained more than awareness of EDS—it deepened his sensitivity to others’ hidden struggles. One man he volunteered alongside left a particularly strong impact.

“He told me his cousins and neighbors lived just down the way—he’d look out his window every morning and see their homes,” Pennington said. “They were all washed away...I looked down at my muddy shoes and thought, ‘That’s the biggest problem I’ve got today.’ Meanwhile, this man is grieving. And instead of collapsing, he’s helping others.”

Pennington said that explains his ongoing motivation to serve others.

“Everyone knows someone whose life can only be lifted through understanding and the grace of God,” he said. “That’s why I show up...I kind of started a mission. I call it ‘one more thing.’ If I can inspire someone to do just one more thing—whatever that means at the level they’re already giving—then it’s worth it.”

### **Do Good:**

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