

# FAITH IN ACTION:

## The United Cajun Navy's Disaster Response and the Power of Christian Unity

How One Man's Faith Led to a Lifeline  
for Thousands in Crisis

Interview By Amanda Cheatwood



**I**n the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005, Todd Terrell lost everything – his family's historic seafood business, their boats, their livelihood. The business, a testament to pioneering spirit, had been started by his great aunt in 1932 during the Great Depression. But from those troubled waters emerged something extraordinary: a calling that would transform personal loss into a mission of hope and restoration through the United Cajun Navy.

"When you lose everything, sometimes you get angry at God," Terrell reflects. "But my faith was such that it was like, 'You know what? There's got to be a better calling for me.' And then next thing you know, we're helping people, and it turned into this. God had a better plan for me."

That better plan has evolved into a remarkable disaster response organization that embodies the principle of beauty rising from ashes. The United Cajun Navy doesn't just respond to natural disasters – they've created a year-round community of care that brings together an unlikely alliance of churches, bikers, boat owners, and volunteers from all walks of life.

### **A SYMPHONY OF SERVICE: DIVERSE COMMUNITIES UNITE**

The organization's strength lies in its ability to bring together people from all walks of life, creating an extraordinary tapestry of service. "You forget that this guy over here is a biker, and the biker forgets that this person over here is a little church-going lady, and they're all working together," Terrell explains. "You would really have to see it to really understand it, how it kind of meshes and gels together."

This diversity extends to their volunteer base. "We have several different kinds of volunteers," Terrell shares. "The first volunteer is someone who may have a boat or a big jacked-up truck or a four-wheeler or an ATV to go rescue somebody. Well, a lot of times those are guys that drink beer, or they smoke cigarettes, or they have tattoos – and no disrespect to any of those people, but sometimes those are the ones that are the big help during a disaster when there's flooding and trees are falling everywhere."

But the organization needs more than just rescue operations. "Those same people don't want to come in a warehouse and sort clothes or store food. So we go to these churches and church groups and schools and say, 'Hey, we need help.' And they come in and help us on that end of it. When you have a disaster, everybody kind of gets together, and it kind of blends everybody in."

**Opposite Page:** Aftermath from Hurricane Helene in Beacon Village in Swannanoa, NC. This area received approx 2-4ft of water before the evacuation order was issued due to the unexpected flood waters from the Swannanoa River. Rather quickly the water was to the roofs and some homes completely submerged. The United Cajun Navy amongst other search and rescue organizations provided efforts to help bring survivors to a safer location.



Todd Terrell, founder and President of The United Cajun Navy.

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*-Todd Terrell  
President and Founder  
United Cajun Navy*





Left & Above: The United Cajun Navy, with air support, delivered supplies just days after Hurricane Helene. Andrew Chambers, head of student life at Excel College, led the distribution efforts and is now partnering with us to rebuild homes in Western North Carolina.

## COAST TO COAST: A GROWING MISSION OF MERCY

As of early 2024, the United Cajun Navy’s operations span the continent, demonstrating the organization’s remarkable growth and adaptability. In the Carolinas, they’re helping communities recover from Hurricane Helene with a focus on winter preparedness. “Right now, we’re in the Carolinas continuing to help over there,” Terrell explains. “A lot of that is warm weather clothes, coats, jackets, heaters. We had a lot of campers that were donated, and we’re going back and making sure that they’re winterized so the pipes don’t freeze.”

*“I would never be sending three 18-wheelers to California because of the expense. But during a disaster such as these fires, it’s like we don’t even think about the money. We’re just like, ‘Let’s do it. God will provide.’ And sure enough, He does.”*

Simultaneously, they’ve launched a significant operation in California, responding to devastating wildfires. Through a partnership with the Dream Center in Los Angeles, they’re providing crucial support to affected communities and first



**Wildfire Relief Efforts in L.A.:** Relief distribution centers operated across Los Angeles as organizations worked tirelessly to support those affected by the devastating wildfires. Partners in the area, including the Dream Center in Los Angeles, played a crucial role in delivering aid to impacted communities. With the help of shipping partner, UPS, UCN relief shipments arrived daily, ensuring supplies reached those in need. *Photo Credit: The Dream Center*





In the wreckage of the sanctuary, one thing remained untouched—the pulpit, with an open Bible still standing. "It'll be a testimony of God."

**Faith Unshaken in Mississippi:** After a devastating tornado tore through First Pentecostal Church in Columbus, MS, the congregation refused to let destruction define them. Pictured: United Cajun Navy founder Todd Terrell (R) with Pastor Steve Blaylock, who remains steadfast in his commitment to rebuild.

responders. "We're in California bringing supplies – PPE stuff, masks for them to be able to get around the smoke, and snacks and stuff for the first responders."

The logistics of such far-reaching operations might seem daunting, but Terrell's faith remains unwavering. "I would never be sending three 18-wheelers to California because of the expense. But during a disaster such as these fires, it's like we don't even think about the money. We're just like, 'Let's do it. God will provide.' And sure enough, He does."

This faith has been repeatedly affirmed through unexpected support. When faced with the challenge of transporting supplies from Baton Rouge to California, they reached out to UPS, hoping for help with one or two trucks. The company responded by offering three trucks and free transportation. "We reached out to them, and they said, 'How many trucks you want?' I said, 'Send me one or two.' They said, 'We'll send you three. Load them up.'"

### **MIRACLES AMONG THE RUINS: STORIES OF HOPE**

Throughout their years of service, the United Cajun Navy has witnessed countless moments of divine providence. One of the most memorable occurred in Lee County, Alabama, after a devastating tornado. "There was a church," Terrell recounts, his voice filled with awe, "and I mean to tell you, the tornado took the roof off of the whole town, and the church was totally destroyed."

The pastor, distraught over the destruction, asked for help recovering items from the church office. As they made

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their way through the debris, they discovered something remarkable. "When we walked to the pulpit, the sun was shining through the roof that was off, shining on the pulpit. And on the pulpit was the open Bible, where the pastor had said services earlier that day, and that was the only thing that wasn't destroyed in the church – the pulpit and the Bible." The image, which Terrell still keeps, serves as a powerful reminder of hope persisting through devastation.

Another profound moment came during a 2016 flood rescue operation. In pitch darkness, with water levels reaching ten feet, Terrell and his team felt drawn to check one particular house. "The water was rolling through there, and we were holding on to the eaves of the house," he recalls. "We looked in, there was about a foot of gap, and I saw this couch up against the corner."

*United Cajun Navy, continued on page 8...*



Above: The United Cajun Navy's mobile search and rescue command center, affectionately called "Black Betty."



United Cajun Navy also uses air operations for its recovery efforts. Helicopters were used for medical evacuations, air drops and Starlink satellite communication systems distributed into North Carolina after Hurricane Helene.

*The woman later told them she thought angels were coming when they reached for her.*

Something prompted them to investigate further, despite the dangerous conditions. "We busted the windows and we almost drowned going in there. There was a lady in there that was alive on a couch, and she had about a foot of air." The woman later told them she thought angels were coming when they reached for her. "It's pitch black dark, seven foot of water, and the lady only had a foot of air, and she grabbed onto my hand."

### **BEYOND DISASTER RESPONSE: YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

The United Cajun Navy's work extends far beyond immediate disaster relief. Through partnerships with organizations like Restoring Purpose Ministries, they operate comprehensive rehabilitation programs that transform lives. "We work with rehabs, faith-based rehabs," Terrell explains. "The men have to go through another program for 30 days, and then they come through one of our partner programs, and it's a faith-based program where they go for a year."

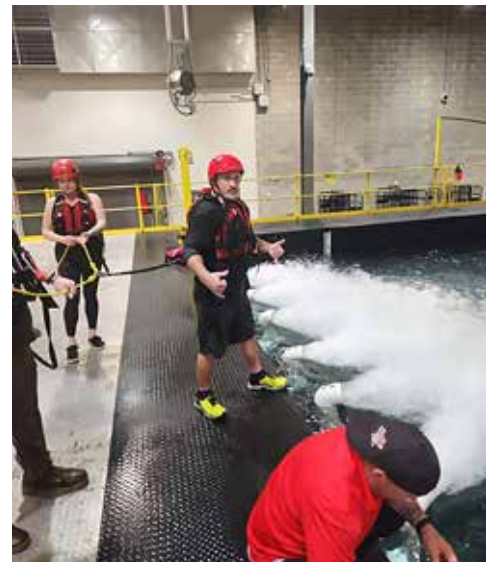




Above: Dozens of boats and divers gather in the waters off the shores of Destin, FL, conducting a search for a former Special Forces member.



Left & Below: United Cajun Navy has volunteers who have been trained to do swift water rescue as well as search and rescue. To qualify, the volunteers must demonstrate basic first responder skills then complete additional training in advanced swift water techniques.







Left: Reed Timmer (L), Extreme Meteorologist, joined United Cajun Navy's Brian S. Trascher as his "wingman" on a mission to bring a missing 7-year-old boy home to his mother. The Mobile County Sheriff's Office kept watch over them from the beaches of Dauphin Island.



Above & Left: a morning briefing being held in the search for a 7-year-old boy off the coast of Alabama. The boat was found, and divers returned to the water near the wreck site. The United Cajun Navy continued providing air support for the search in coordination with the Mobile County Sheriff's Office.

These programs address multiple aspects of recovery and reintegration. “We get them a job, help them if they have back child support, license issues, or whatever. But they have to go to church every Sunday, and they have to attend Bible study throughout the week.” The success rate speaks for itself: “We’ve got a 90-plus percent ratio, a success ratio, of people going through these programs.”

They’ve also developed innovative programs to address contemporary social challenges. “We work with a group called Grandparents Raising Grandchildren,” Terrell shares. “That in today’s society is a big problem, where grandparents, at an alarming rate, are having to raise their grandkids.” Through this initiative, they organize activities like fishing trips and hunting excursions for troubled youth, combining outdoor activities with spiritual mentorship.

“We take these kids fishing and different things, and we give them Bibles, and we have pastors that are out there actually praying over them and guiding them,” Terrell explains. “A lot of times these kids are troubled, and they don’t want to go to church. But when they’re around other people and they’re around counselors and pastors, it’s almost like they’re like, ‘Wow, if I’m good, and if I become more faith-based, I get to go fishing.’”

***“You gotta understand, a lot of people get angry at God ... but you learn and you grow and you realize it’s part of the process.”***

### **SPIRITUAL SUPPORT IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

The organization’s approach to disaster response includes a strong spiritual component. Their chaplaincy program, led by a mass casualty chaplain, provides crucial support during and after disasters. Recently, their chaplain has been working with families affected by a terrorist incident in New Orleans, providing daily spiritual support and practical assistance to hospitalized victims and their families.

“Our chaplain is in there counseling them, making sure that they go through the process,” Terrell explains. “We help them get a wheelchair and stuff, and he prays with them every day and counsels them. You gotta understand, a lot of people get angry at God... but you learn and you grow and you realize it’s part of the process.”

*United Cajun Navy, continued on page 12...*

# Working Together in Crisis:

## Chad Dinkel and Restoring Purpose Ministries Join the United Cajun Navy in Service

In times of crisis, unity is essential. For Chad Dinkel, founder of Restoring Purpose Ministries, working alongside the United Cajun Navy has been a powerful reminder of the strength found in collaboration. Together, their mission is clear: to offer immediate disaster relief, restore hope, and provide a tangible expression of God’s love when it’s needed most.

### **A SHARED MISSION OF SERVICE**

Chad Dinkel’s ministry, Restoring Purpose Ministries, was born out of his desire to help others in the face of hardship. As someone who has seen the impact of natural disasters, Chad knew that physical aid wasn’t the only need in a time of crisis—people also needed spiritual restoration. This drive to serve others and make a difference led him to partner with the United Cajun Navy, a group of civilian volunteers who answer the call for help during times of extreme natural disasters.

“The United Cajun Navy is all about being there when disaster strikes,” Chad shares. “They are a group of people who leave everything behind to help those in need, and that aligns perfectly with the heart of Restoring Purpose Ministries. We both want to be there for people—offering them not only practical help, but also the love of Christ.”

### **BRINGING HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DEVASTATION**

The United Cajun Navy is widely known for its efforts to rescue victims of flooding, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. Whether it’s a small boat making its way through flooded streets or a convoy of volunteers bringing supplies to those stranded in affected areas, their team has a proven track record of responding quickly and effectively. Chad, who has been actively involved in their efforts, emphasizes the importance of being present during the most desperate moments.

*Restoring Purpose Ministries, continued on page 11...*



*“We have several warehouses throughout the country that have supplies in it,” Terrell explains. “When a disaster hits, all we have to do is put the trucks on the road with the supplies, and that’s what we do.”*

### **A NETWORK OF FAITH AND SERVICE**

The United Cajun Navy has developed strong partnerships with various faith-based organizations across the country. They work closely with City Impact, Dream Centers, and local churches nationwide, maintaining a network of warehouses stocked with essential supplies. This preparation allows them to respond quickly when disaster strikes.

*The United Cajun Navy stands as a testament to how faith can transform personal tragedy into community triumph. Through their work, they demonstrate that the greatest revival often happens in the midst of serving others, as diverse groups come together with a common purpose of helping those in need.*

“We have several warehouses throughout the country that have supplies in it,” Terrell explains. “When a disaster hits, all we have to do is put the trucks on the road with the supplies, and that’s what we do.” Their approach to disaster preparation varies depending on the type of emergency. “Every storm is different. You have snow storms, you have tornadoes, you have floods, hurricanes. Not every hurricane has a flood. Hurricane Michael in 2018 wasn’t flooding that was a problem – it was trees down everywhere.”

### **JOIN THE MISSION: A CALL TO SERVICE**

For those feeling called to disaster relief ministry, Terrell’s advice is straightforward: start with your local church. “Many churches throughout the country and the world have some form of disaster ministry,” he explains. “If you don’t have a church, get involved in one and see if they have a disaster ministry, or if they have a ministry to help people.”



The United Cajun Navy’s main warehouse in Baton Rouge is buzzing with activity, with trucks loaded daily with relief supplies heading out to those in need.

Even between disasters, there are always opportunities to serve. “There’s always somebody in the church that needs help,” Terrell notes. The organization works year-round with local churches to identify and assist community members in need, from elderly individuals requiring home repairs to families facing temporary hardships.

“Everybody has used clothes in their closets,” Terrell suggests as a simple way to start helping. “Go pick out some used clothes and bring them to church, and we’ll pick them up. And while you’re at church getting a free jacket and bringing your clothes there, we’re trying to get the communities in, especially in the Christian communities, to help back if you can, because they love to give back.”

The United Cajun Navy stands as a testament to how faith can transform personal tragedy into community triumph. Through their work, they demonstrate that the greatest revival often happens in the midst of serving others, as diverse groups come together with a common purpose of helping those in need.

“Money was tight, and I was like, ‘You know what? God, if this is meant to be, make something happen,’” Terrell reflects. “Here would come a big check, or here would come a big donation, and it keeps me going. So I have to be true to my word to keep helping, because I asked for it, and He gave it to me, and I can’t run away.” ■

*To learn more about the United Cajun Navy or to support their mission, visit their website at [www.unitedcajunnavy.org](http://www.unitedcajunnavy.org). The organization welcomes volunteers and donations to support their ongoing disaster relief and community support efforts.*



In 2024, Restoring Purpose Ministries launched the Repurpose Mobile Boutique—a thrift store on wheels designed to bless and serve the community in need.

“Working with the Cajun Navy has been a life-changing experience,” Chad reflects. “Seeing communities devastated by disaster and knowing that you are part of the team that is bringing relief, it’s humbling. But it also brings to light how crucial it is for all of us to come together in times like these.”

Chad’s work alongside the United Cajun Navy has allowed him to be on the front lines of disaster relief, where faith and action meet. His team at Restoring Purpose Ministries is often right there alongside the Cajun Navy, providing supplies, offering emotional support, and—most importantly—sharing the hope of Christ with those in need.

### A KINGDOM OF VOLUNTEERS: ONE MISSION, ONE HEART

What makes the collaboration between Restoring Purpose Ministries and the United Cajun Navy so powerful is their shared values: compassion, selflessness, and a desire to serve others. In times of disaster, volunteers from all walks of life come together, united by the belief that they can make a difference.

“It’s not just about getting people out of danger—it’s about showing them that they are loved and valued by God,” says Chad. “I’ve seen the power of God at work through the Cajun Navy, and it’s been incredible to witness how everyone’s efforts combine to restore lives, rebuild communities, and offer hope in a way that only God can.”

Chad believes that this partnership goes beyond just providing immediate relief. It’s about building long-term relationships and offering lasting support to individuals who are hurting. The United Cajun Navy and Restoring Purpose Ministries are committed to being a steady presence in communities long after the initial crisis has passed, offering follow-up care, resources, and most importantly, prayer.



Angel Dinkel leads Kids Jam, a program by Restoring Purpose Ministries that brings church to children in under-served neighborhoods, sharing Christ’s love and building community.

### A CALL TO SERVE TOGETHER

As disaster seasons continue to impact communities across the nation, Chad’s vision for his ministry remains clear: “When we come together, when we work alongside each other, we can accomplish so much more. There is so much power in unity, and when we combine our efforts with organizations like the United Cajun Navy, we have the opportunity to transform lives.”

Chad’s work with the United Cajun Navy and Restoring Purpose Ministries shows that when we serve with compassion, great things happen. It’s a reminder that, no matter the circumstances, we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the midst of chaos.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

Through his collaboration with the United Cajun Navy, Chad Dinkel has seen firsthand the incredible impact of volunteers coming together to serve those in need. As their mission continues to unfold, one thing remains certain: God is moving through their efforts, restoring hope, and bringing peace to those affected by disaster. ■



**Chad Dinkel's** life is a powerful story of transformation and faith. Since God changed his life in 2000, he has devoted himself to addiction ministry, helping restore the broken. In 2015, he and his wife, Angel, founded Restoring Purpose Ministries, and in 2018, they planted Purpose Church in Baton Rouge, LA. As a pastor, Chad has walked alongside countless families, offering hope and guidance. A loving husband and father to Brody (15) and Abram (13), Chad's passion for Jesus and others inspires those around him to embrace God's purpose for their lives. His faith and love continue to make a lasting impact. [rpm828.org](http://rpm828.org)