

Preemptive Love and Search for Common Ground merge

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—A year after ousting its founders, the Preemptive Love Coalition announced March 16 that it has merged with the international peace-building nonprofit Search for Common Ground.

Search for Common Ground CEO Shamil Idriss called the merger a “strategic leap forward” that allows the work of Preemptive Love to continue while expanding the broader goals of the joint organizations.

“Preemptive Love’s rapid response capabilities and community development experience, paired with the established history and experience of Search, will greatly expand the ability of both organizations to serve the communities with whom we work,” he said.

Year of turmoil at Preemptive Love

The merger brings an end to a year of uncertainty for Preemptive Love.

Founded in 2007 by a pair of ex-missionaries living in Iraq, the group grew rapidly by rallying young supporters to provide funding, first for heart surgeries and then expanding to broader relief work in the Middle East and beyond.



Jeremy Courtney,
founder of Preemptive
Love

Founders Jeremy and Jessica Courtney had a knack for convincing supporters they could play an active role in responding on the ground and were especially gifted at video storytelling and the use of social media.

Jeremy Courtney grew up in Leander as the grandson of a Baptist minister. He attended Howard Payne University and earned his Master of Divinity degree from Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.

Even though Preemptive Love is a secular organization, its work proved particularly attractive to Christian influencers and young Christians who were disillusioned with politicized religion and wanted to change the world. The founders saw delivering aid as a form of making peace, inspired by the teachings of Jesus.

In 2021, the founders were placed on leave due to concerns about an unhealthy, abusive culture at the organization and allegations they had misled donors. The [board cut ties](#) with the Courtneys in early 2022.

Need for organizational changes

Their departure led to a year of self-evaluation and the realization Preemptive Love needed to make significant organizational changes in order to survive. That led its leaders to seek a merger with a more established organization, according to Jen Meyerson, the chief program officer for Preemptive Love.

“We are a peacemaking organization, but we are so young,” said Meyerson. “To be able to partner with an organization that has more than 40 years of experience in this space brings a real sense of excitement and anticipation.”

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground works on defusing conflict and peacemaking in 31 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America.

The newly merged organization will have a combined budget of \$76.5 million and about 800 staff.

Not all the staff of Preemptive Love will join the new organization, Meyerson said. Preemptive Love is working on transition plans for anyone let go due to the merger. The current board of Preemptive Love has dissolved, though at least one former Preemptive Love board member will join the Search for Common Ground board.

For now, Preemptive Love will still operate under its original name and most of its programs will remain intact, even though the two groups are now legally merged.

Importance of trust

Idriss said it will take time to communicate the changes in the organization to donors and the communities that Search for Common Ground serves.

“Trust is going to be No. 1 for us on all fronts,” he said. “Trust with the PLC staff who are coming over as well as those who will be transitioning. Trust with the donor base. Trust with the communities we work with on the ground.”

Idriss said that Search for Common Ground has been involved in direct aid in the past, though mostly working with partners. Adding the Preemptive Love staff will give the group added expertise.

He also hopes Search for Common Ground will benefit from Preemptive Love’s ability to engage with donors. Most of Search’s past funding has come from larger donors, such as governments, rather than individuals.

“On average, Search for Common Ground leverages every dollar we get from individuals to about \$20 of funding from larger institutions,” he said. “But to be frank with you, it is a lot harder for us to raise that single dollar than it is to raise the institutional funding.

“For the PLC community of supporters, I think it’d be really exciting for them to know that not only is their contribution, financial and otherwise, going to go toward building peace, but we actually have a system for leveraging that into much more significant support.”

He said the two groups also have programs that complement each other. Preemptive Love has the ability to respond quickly in a crisis. Search for Common Ground has a long-term plan for community impact.

“PLC has this brilliant and motivating and inspiring way of coming in at the front end. And we have a very well-established way of continuing that

sustained change across entire societies,” he said. “I don’t know any organization that brings both these things together right now in the peace-building sector.”