

Preemptive Love Coalition accused of misleading donors

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—After several former employees of Preemptive Love Coalition accused co-founders Jeremy and Jessica Courtney of misleading donors and abusing staff, the board of directors of the popular international aid group has hired the investigative firm Guidepost Solutions to look into the allegations.

Founded by the Courtneys in 2008, Preemptive Love raises millions of dollars each year for relief work in several countries including Iraq, Syria and Mexico.

On Dec. 16, Preemptive Love's former communications director, Ben Irwin, published an article on the [online platform Medium](#) that accuses the Courtneys of verbally and psychologically abusing staff and running the organization "like a cult" by demanding absolute loyalty and punishing dissent.

The next day, Preemptive Love's board published an [open letter](#) saying they received "serious complaints" from a number of former employees about the Courtneys involving "race, gender and power dynamics." The complaints, which came in the form of a letter sent in August and signed by more than two dozen former employees, led the board to launch the investigation.

Founders placed on leave of absence

According to the board's letter, the Courtneys will take a leave of absence during the investigation, but the board allowed them to retain "a small

number of carve-outs for which Jeremy and Jessica could remain partially engaged with their duties.” The Courtneys have been removed from direct management and financial decisions.



Jeremy Courtney,
founder of Preemptive
Love

The Courtneys are former missionaries who have kept close ties with Christian donors and leaders. Irwin wrote that, while many think Preemptive Love is a Christian charity, it is technically not religiously affiliated.

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

In his Medium article, Irwin accused the Courtneys of deceptive messaging aimed at donors. He included a picture of a since-removed Instagram post from August in which Preemptive Love used the Haitian earthquake to solicit donations, despite having no programming in Haiti.

Irwin also claimed that Jeremy Courtney edited video footage to make it appear that he was caught in an airstrike in Mosul, Iraq, in 2017. Irwin

alleged that while Courtney was present in the city at the time, the explosion effects were added post-production to exaggerate his proximity to danger.

Allegations of questionable spending

Irwin also claimed he observed questionable spending practices. Early in the pandemic, according to Irwin, Jeremy publicly announced waiving his \$165,000 a year salary to preserve staff and programming, only to reinstate his pay months later. Irwin also wrote that in 2021, Preemptive Love spent \$208,000 to send packages with “designer-quality” shirts to thousands of monthly donors while seeming to mislead staff about how they were paid for.

Irwin, who worked for Preemptive Love six years, resigned on July 26, the same day he filed a whistleblower complaint to the board.

Following Irwin’s post on Medium, former employee Audrey White recently posted on Twitter asking the public to hold the Courtneys and the board accountable for abuse of power and exploitation of vulnerable people. “I saw them humiliate the refugees they claimed to be empowering, abuse and bully the local (Iraqi) female staff while preaching about ‘loving anyway’ online,” White wrote.

Former Preemptive Love writer Courtney Christenson also wrote an open letter to the Courtneys, which she posted online. “I cannot sit by and watch you preach peace while you bully, gaslight, and abuse the peacemakers on your team until they give up and quit,” Christenson wrote.

The board is currently awaiting the results of the investigation and expects them “very soon,” according to their letter.

“No matter what we learn, the board is committed to making all necessary

decisions, no matter how difficult, to rectify any past missteps, renew our commitment to care for every team member, and ensure that PLC becomes a healthier organization,” they wrote.

Irwin thinks that the Courtneys need to step down if the organization is to be a true force for good.

“Before I left, I said there was only one way forward, and that was facing rather than trying to bury the harm that was caused, or gaslighting the people you’ve hurt,” Irwin told RNS. “There is still only one way forward. ‘Love anyway’ is a powerful vision. But it does not eliminate the need for accountability and justice.”