

Groups cut ties with author Chris Heuertz following 'spiritual abuse' allegations

by [Yonat Shimron](#) in the [July 15, 2020](#) issue



Author Chris Hueretz speaks in 2019. (Video screengrab via Lipscomb University)

Zondervan, the Christian media and publishing company, is suspending promotion of two books and indefinitely halting a documentary by popular Enneagram teacher and best-selling author Christopher Heuertz after allegations by nearly three dozen people who saw or experienced “spiritual and psychological abuse” by him.

The Center for Action and Contemplation, founded by popular writer Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar, has also said it would “pause” all collaboration with Heuertz.

These decisions follow a public post on the platform Medium signed by 33 women and men who wrote that Heuertz “has harmed many people and we cannot remain silent anymore.” Many others have since corroborated the accusations and added their stories.

The June 10 post described a pattern of spiritual and psychological abuse by Heuertz, a liberal Christian active in social justice causes as well as the

contemplative tradition borrowed from Catholicism. He is an expert on the Enneagram, a model of the human psyche based on nine personality types that has exploded in popularity in certain Christian circles.

Heuertz apologized publicly on his website, saying, “Over the years, I failed to maintain suitable boundaries in some of my friendships with women. Some of those became inappropriate in nature and this pattern caused great harm to my marriage.

“While none of these relationships crossed physical boundaries,” he continued, “with the exception of one extended embrace, they were still inappropriate. I didn’t realize then how the dynamics of power surrounding these friendships could be so damaging. It’s one of the deepest regrets of my life.”

The board of Gravity, Heuertz’s organization based in Omaha, Nebraska, said it would hire a firm to investigate the allegations. It also announced that Heuertz and his wife, Phileena, who co-direct the center, would take a voluntary sabbatical until the investigation is completed.

George Mekhail, who chairs the board of directors at Gravity, a spiritual retreat center, said there was an anonymous claim made against Heuertz a few years after he started Gravity. But the veracity of the claim could not be verified and the accusation fell outside his work with Gravity. Mekhail did not detail the nature of that claim.

The investigation the Gravity board is now launching will examine all those claims.

“We’re taking this very seriously,” said Mekhail. “We want to get to the bottom of what’s going on, what exactly are the nature of the claims, so we can take action as needed.”

In 2012, according to the Medium post, Heuertz was asked to step down from a leadership role at Word Made Flesh, an international organization that combats poverty and human trafficking around the world. His dismissal came, according to the former coworkers who drafted the post, after several women of color he had mentored complained about his alleged sexually predatory behavior.

Heuertz’s agent disputes that he was let go from the organization for cause and said that, in the past, Word Made Flesh spoke highly of Heuertz’s tenure with the group.

A statement from Word Made Flesh posted recently said it condemns the abuse that occurred and supports the women in their efforts to bring accountability and transparency.

The statement also apologized for its “past failure to protect staff” and acknowledged “the pain that they have carried and still bear, and support their courageous action to publicly state the wrongdoings.”

It was not clear if there were new allegations of misconduct by Heuertz or if the allegations in the public post authored by Daphne Eck, a communications consultant from Castle Rock, Washington, date to Heuertz’s time at Word Made Flesh. Eck was unavailable for comment. —Religion News Service

**FOLLOWING UP (UPDATED AUGUST 10):** An independent investigation into accusations of spiritual and psychological abuse by popular Enneagram teacher and best-selling author Christopher Heuertz found no evidence of misconduct after those who raised the allegations declined to cooperate with the inquiry.

The third-party investigation was undertaken by the board of Heuertz’s organization, Gravity, a spiritual retreat center based in Omaha, Nebraska. According to a statement from the board, none of the 33 individuals who accused Heuertz of creating a culture of abuse agreed to meet with the investigator or provide corroborating information.

The investigation did conclude that Heuertz engaged in three inappropriate relationships between 2007 and 2012, while he led a previous nonprofit, Word Made Flesh. Those incidents had been previously addressed by the board of Word Made Flesh, from which Heuertz eventually resigned.

*A version of this article appeared in the print edition under the title "Groups cut ties with author Chris Heuertz following 'spiritual abuse' allegations."*