

As a small community of the Walk to Emmaus movement, Greater Scioto Valley, headquartered in Chillicothe, Ohio, started all the way back in 1995. Since its inception, the Greater Scioto Valley Emmaus Community faithfully held walks for men and women under the guidelines of the Upper Room, a discipleship ministry of the United Methodist Church. The Walk to Emmaus was always portrayed as an “ecumenical ministry,” but was strictly governed by the UMC. For most of the early years, the UMC held to the strict teachings of the Bible, including issues of sex and marriage. But as with most of the country, soon began to be influenced by more liberal ideologies. Situated in rural southern Ohio, most of our congregations held more conservative views and did not like where the UMC was leaning. As the UMC became more liberal in its theology, many of the past members of the Greater Scioto Valley Emmaus Community stopped supporting the efforts of GSVE to continue to hold Walks, 3-day discipleship building weekends, and it has become more and more difficult to recruit clergy who naturally held more conservative views as well. As the board of the GSVE soldiered on, planning weekends became increasingly difficult because the Walk to Emmaus was seen as a direct extension of the UMC, even though we at GSVE held firm to our conservative roots. The local GSVE board struggled to find enough volunteers to help on weekend events as many members simply did not want to be affiliated with the UMC, especially if they were of another denomination. Even though we called ourselves an “ecumenical ministry,” we could never fully separate ourselves from the direction and oversight of the UMC through the Upper Room Ministries.

Just as we found it difficult to find volunteers, the United Methodist Church began to fracture over these same issues. The major split in the United Methodist Church (UMC) began in earnest around 2019, driven by decades of conflict over LGBTQ+ ordination and marriage, culminating in a formal schism.

Key Details of the Split:

There are several issues that are leading to these discussions including:

- Issues of the spiritual teaching of the United Methodist Church
- Issues of inclusion
- Issues of mandated apportionments and costs

Disaffiliation Process: Paragraph 2553 was added to the Book of Discipline, allowing U.S. congregations to leave with their property and assets, resulting in over 7,600 churches (about 25% of U.S. congregations) departing, mostly to the conservative Global Methodist Church (GMC), which was launched in May 2022 and provided a new home for thousands of congregations disaffiliating from the UMC. The peak of the disaffiliation movement occurred between 2022 and the end of 2023.

Fundamental Issues: Disagreements primarily centered on whether homosexuality is compatible with Christian teaching, with progressives pushing for inclusion and conservatives upholding traditional doctrines.

It was during this same time period that GSVE was struggling with the affiliation with the church that had been home to the ministry since its inception in 1995. New leadership in the church often ignored the value of the GSVE ministry and began restricting our use of the facilities. There was a strong sense of not being welcome there any longer and in 2023 the Board of Directors of the GSVE set out to look for other venues in which to hold the walks. We were blessed to find a Christian church camp, Koinonia Farms Camp in Laurelville, Ohio which had recently opened as a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) Camp. The owners, Michael and Annette Linton, had never taken a Walk, but with an eager interest in partnering with other conservative Christian ministries, they stepped out in faith and allowed us to have our first walks in the Spring of 2024. Imagine their surprise when they came over during that first walk to see how things were going only to find the entire dining area decorated with rainbows! It took us a bit of convincing that we were INDEED conservative and that our use of the rainbow was out of tradition of the Walk to Emmaus, originally garnered from the folk song DeColores.

This partnership with Koinonia Farms Camp and the Lintons has been an amazing leap forward for our ministry and is the catalyst for seeking an alternative to the Upper Room.

You may or may not know, each year the GSVE Board of Directors has to sign an annual covenant with the Upper Room which governs most of the details of our community. And, this governance has always been “one-sided.” We had to “covenant” to do everything the way that the Upper Room dictated or we would be in violation and subject to legal action as set forth in the covenant. It specifically states this in every annual covenant, exactly how we would be legally liable! And each year, we faithfully fulfilled our side of this covenant. But, there have been some major changes in the leadership at the Upper Room with the retirement of the “old guard” who governed from the status quo. As long as we followed their rules, we could have access to their materials and use the name, The Walk to Emmaus. They “allowed” us to keep running the walks with a conservative flavor. But all of that started to change with the split of the UMC and with the new, progressive leadership at the Upper Room.

As a Board, we could see the writing on the wall. Many of you may not know this, but the Upper Room used the COVID lockdown to totally rewrite the 3-day schedule for Chrysalis, the teenage ministry similar to the Walk to Emmaus (Emmaus-on-Steroids, as it is lovingly called!) This new curriculum included new talk outlines for the speakers with “inclusive” language and the elimination of the Singles Talk and the Marriage Talk. These 2 talks had been staples of the Chrysalis program for many years. Instead, they combined the outlines into a new talk entitled, Faithful Love. The directions to the leadership was that this talk *could* be

given by a married couple, or by a father/son, mother/daughter team, OR by a couple in a “committed relationship.”

In looking at the current talk outlines provided by the Upper Room, there has not been any update to these outlines since before 2012. It is most likely that the Upper Room will begin to roll out a new program, especially with their new director who is “a family pastor, writer, and product developer, who has devoted her life to nurturing faith, cultivating belonging, and sparking wonder in communities of all ages.” In the Upper Room’s introduction after hiring her as the Director of the Emmaus Ministries, they describe her as “a gifted leader with a passion for building meaningful connections and creating accessible, Spirit-led resources that meet people where they are on their journey.”

“Brittany holds a BA and MA in Christian Education, along with an Executive MBA. She is the author of *Belong: Participant Series*, *Raising Good People*, *the Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook*, and the *Bible Basics Storybook*. She has also contributed to numerous curriculum projects, including *Safer Sanctuaries* and the *Deep Blue Bible Storybook*.” She posts on her personal social media site that she is a supporter of LGBTQ+ events.

All of this is further complicated by the new 2026 Covenant with the Upper Room Ministries. The covenant has basically been the same legal jargon for the past 10 years, but now it includes new language and new fees. This new “inclusive language” will force us to follow any decision that they make with regard to progressive ideologies. And they are now asking us to give a mandatory donation of \$300 per year, in addition to paying them \$25 per pilgrim per walk (increased in 2020 from \$13 per pilgrim) and mandating that we purchase all new manuals for each walk, at \$10 apiece. We have already had to increase the cost to attend a walk to \$100 just to cover the costs of the \$25 fee and to cover the increased cost of food! Now they are mandating another \$300 per year and will force us to purchase new manuals for each walk rather than reusing or photocopying the originals. And when they rewrite the curriculum, we will have no choice but to purchase everything all over again!

We say all of this to explain **WHY** the current GSVE Board of Directors created a subcommittee to explore options for our community. We felt that we needed to search for an alternative ministry for the PEOPLE of the Greater Scioto Valley. The subcommittee started meeting in the late fall/early winter 2025 and explored many other 3-day discipleship building platforms similar to the Walk to Emmaus. While there were many similar programs, some were already embracing a “progressive” theology. Others which aligned more with our conservative roots were not responsive to our requests for an open dialogue. With so many doors shutting in our face, we felt the Spirit guiding us to a brand new, totally fresh ministry involving the

same people that have been so instrumental in running this ministry for the past 15 years, but with a new twist on the basic Cursillo model. With this direction, and as always, bathed in prayer, we met, discussed ideas, formed a mission statement, created a proposed Statement of Beliefs and even proposed by-laws for a new ministry. As the subcommittee of the GSVE Board of Directors, it could only make a recommendation to the Board. And the GSVE Board can only make a recommendation to you, the Community. It will need to go to a vote of the Community, whether to stay with the Upper Room and the Walk to Emmaus with all of their covenant regulations or to separate and go our own way. If the community votes to disaffiliate with the Upper Room, we will need to close the official books on Greater Scioto Valley Emmaus, return all of the current Upper Room materials (manuals), close the corporation with the State of Ohio and US Department of Treasury and decide what to do with any and all of the current assets, equipment and savings accounts. We think that the board would make a proposal to the community to donate all of this to a new, home-grown ministry, Abide (Southeast Ohio) and return Walk to Emmaus materials to the Upper Room. Stay tuned for more information to come soon about this exciting opportunity!

We know that all of this sounds radical and you may question, “why change a good thing?” But, if you had been involved any at all in the past 10 years, you likely have felt the building tension between God’s word and the ways of the world. The Walk to Emmaus was an amazing ministry that changed our lives and we know that it changed yours, too. But, that wonderful ministry is not the same as it was 20 years ago as it is being changed by the new leadership in the Upper Room! As duly elected leaders of this community, we feel it is our responsibility to keep you informed and to offer options. As your leaders, we covet your prayers! We have felt the tugging of the Holy Spirit and have responded in the best way we know how. We look forward to the conversations and questions that you may have.

Respectfully,

2026 Greater Scioto Valley Board of Directors

Joe McQuiniff, Amy Grand, Courtney Hines, Michele Rout

Jamie Darling, Randy Bratka, Kirk Mootispaw, Tom Dishong

Rusty Staten, Aaron Grand, Julie Mounts, Lana McGrath,

Zakk Hines, Jerry Kunz, David Coates