

**This Special Edition of our SoL Newsletter includes important information about our upcoming plans to gradually resume in-person worship at SoL. We hope you will take the time to read it in its entirety.**

**From the Pastor**

Greetings in the name of Christ! Can you believe it's already been a year since Song of Life UMC held its last in-person worship service? Be honest: how many of you thought we would still be worshipping and meeting online a full year after the global pandemic was declared? I know I didn't...and yet, here we are. This past year has been difficult for all of us, not just as a church, but as individuals and families. We've been isolated from each other and from the people we love the most. We've had to endure remote learning and working, but the good news is, (hopefully) it's almost over. As more of us are vaccinated, the CDC says we can gradually resume some of our normal activities. As of this writing, both David and I have received our first "jab" of the Pfizer vaccine, and by Easter, we will both be fully vaccinated! I give thanks to God for the researchers and scientists who tirelessly worked to develop the vaccine, and for the doctors and nurses who care for those who have gotten sick. We are grateful for all they have done and continue doing to protect us from the most concerning affects of the virus.



We have been monitoring the COVID-19 cases in Arizona and especially in the area around our church. And since the middle of February, the 7-day average number of positive cases in the zip codes around our church have remained low—below 50 cases per day. So we sent out a survey to those for whom we have email addresses asking for feedback about the possibility of returning to limited in-person worship. Based on our analysis and the results of the survey, we will gradually return to in-person worship in the safest way we can. Assuming cases remain low, we will launch our "Welcome Back to In-Person Worship" on Easter Sunday.

In this Special Edition of our Newsletter, you will find important information that you'll need to know if you are ready to return to in-person worship. And for those who are not yet ready, we will continue offering worship online as well. We hope this newsletter will answer all of your questions about returning to in-person worship, but if we missed something, please send an email to [info@songoflifeumc.org](mailto:info@songoflifeumc.org) so we can answer your questions or address your concerns. We want everyone to feel comfortable about returning to in-person worship when they are ready.

*God Bless, Pastor Jody*

**Possible In-Person Worship Survey Results**

**Total Survey Responses: 63 (Representing 111 People)**

Question: Are you ready to return to In-Person Worship?

- 63 Total Responses
- Yes: 57.1%
- No: 34.9%
- Other: 7.9%

Question: Would you attend worship outdoors or wait to attend indoors?

- 47 Total Responses
- Outdoors: 78.7%
- Indoors: 10.6%
- Other: 10.6%

Question: Which worship schedule would you prefer? (See below for a description of the options offered)

- 46 Total Responses
- Option 1: 17.4%
- Option 2: 19.6%
- Option 3: 47.8%
- Other: 15.2%

Worship Service Schedule Options:

- Option 1: 8:00-9:00am Outdoor In-Person\* followed by 9:30-10:30am Online Worship^
- Option 2: 8:15-9:15 am Outdoor In-Person\* followed by 9:45-10:45am Online Worship^
- Option 3: 8:30-9:15am Outdoor In-Person\*\* followed by 9:45-10:45am Online Worship^

\* Outdoor Worship Congregation limited to no more than 50 people including volunteers & worship team

^ Online Worship broadcasted from inside the Sanctuary with no congregation present

\*\*Option 3 Outdoor In-Person Worship will be shortened to 45 minutes by reducing music and other worship elements



**Easter Sunday  
April 4, 2021**

- 6:00 AM Easter Sunrise Outdoor In-Person Worship\***
- 8:00 AM Online Worship**
- 9:30 AM Easter Celebration Outdoor In-Person Worship\***

**\*Subject to COVID-19 caseload in the area surrounding Song of Life UMC**

**Holy Week Worship Schedule**

- 4/1 Maundy Thursday Worship, 7pm (Online)**
- 4/2 Good Friday Worship, 7pm (Online)**
- 4/3 Easter Vigil, 7pm (Online)**
- 4/4 Easter Sunday (see above)**

**Will you help us decorate both our Sanctuary and our Patio for Easter Sunday by either donating a flowering plant or contributing to our Easter Sunday Decorations Fund? More Information to Follow**

## In-Person Worship at Song of Life UMC

On the following pages you will find what you need to know about in-person worship at Song of Life. The information and instructions here include provisions from our *Return to In-Person Worship Plan* which was approved by our Leadership Board last year. We realize some of these requirements may seem restrictive, but they are intended to help us all continue to remain safe and healthy. We also know the requirements listed here may be different from those you will find at other churches, even other United Methodist Churches. Each church developed their own requirements based on their own congregation's needs. If you have questions about these requirements, please send us an email at [info@songoflifeumc.org](mailto:info@songoflifeumc.org) and we'll do our best to respond to them as quickly as possible.

### What Will In-Person Worship at SoL Look Like?

1. First and foremost, in-person worship at SoL will be guided by the scientific and health care community. As long as positive COVID-19 cases in the 7 zip codes surrounding the church remain at 50 or less on average per day, we will offer in-person worship with a limited number of people present. We will begin offering in-person worship outdoors, since this has been proven to be safer than being indoors.
2. Weather permitting, worship will be held outside on our church patio with the congregation seated in family groups on the patio and in the paved parking lot. If rain is forecasted, in-person worship will be cancelled the night before and the congregation will be encouraged to worship with us online.
3. Worshipers will bring their own chairs (camping or patio chairs suggested) and will be seated in family groups at least 6' away from other family groups. They will be directed by our ushers to their assigned seating area, and once they have been seated will not be permitted to move to other groups to greet one another. Waves and socially distanced "air hugs" will not only be permitted but strongly encouraged.
4. Worshipers will park in the dirt parking area northwest of the church buildings and will enter the worship space (aka patio) by way of the entrance to the west of the classroom building, maintaining social distancing as they check-in and receive further instructions.
5. Those who are disabled or need additional assistance may park directly north of (or behind) the classroom/office building. An entrance into the worship space for those needing extra assistance will be available on the east end of the office/classroom building.
6. Regular worshipers will register their attendance by using the Check-in option on our Church Center App or by checking in with one of our Attendance Takers. Instructions for downloading our app are included on Page 4 of this newsletter
7. First time guests will be provided with chairs from the church which will be sanitized after worship. They will also be given Attendance Cards long with our *Returning to In-Person Worship Covenant* and asked to return them to an usher at the end of worship.
8. During worship, the congregation will remain seated in their family groups until they are dismissed by the worship leader. Exception: individual worshipers may, if absolutely necessary, use one of the restrooms if it is available. See below for restroom protocols.
9. Restroom usage will be limited to emergency situations only with access through the north door to the Sanctuary building. No more than one person will be allowed in each restroom at a time. Exception: a parent may accompany a child into the restroom if needed. Those using the restroom will be required to sanitize it before leaving according to the posted instructions using supplies provided by the church.
10. Bulletins will not be distributed before or during worship. The Digital Bulletin will be made available online the night before. Worshipers are encouraged to bring their own electronic device in order to view the bulletin during worship.
11. At the end of worship, the congregation will remain seated until the worship leader dismisses them by section. Worshipers will return to their cars without further contact or fellowship with other worshipers or worship team leaders. Those who used chairs provided by the church will leave them in their assigned seating area for processing by volunteers.

**Have you signed and sent in your *Return to In-Person Worship Covenant* form? If not, please do so ASAP. It is your necessary first step you want to attend in-person worship at Song of Life. You'll find the *Covenant* form at [songoflifeumc.org/covenant](http://songoflifeumc.org/covenant)**

### What must I do if I want to attend in-person worship at SoL?

1. Before you do anything, if you want to attend in-person worship, you must sign and send your *Return to In-Person Worship Covenant* to the Church Office. The *Covenant* form was originally sent out last fall when we were hoping to offer in-person worship but were unable to do so. If you already signed and returned your *Covenant* to the office, you don't need to do it again. If, however, you are unsure whether or not you returned your *Covenant* to the church, please contact us at [info@songoflifeumc.org](mailto:info@songoflifeumc.org).
2. In order to attend in-person worship, you must make a reservation for you and your family members. On Monday afternoons, a link will be provided by email that you will use to make your reservation for the following Sunday. When you click on that link, additional instructions will be provided both before and after you make your reservation. If all available slots have already been filled, you will have the option of being placed on a waiting list. If you find you are unable to attend after successfully making a reservation, we ask that you cancel your reservation so another person or family can take your place.

### What must I do while attending in-person worship at SoL?

1. When you arrive for in-person worship, you will park in the appropriate parking area north and northwest of the classroom building. Please reserve the parking spaces directly to the north and behind the building for those who are disabled or need extra assistance.
2. During worship you will stay in the seating area assigned to you and your family. Greeting others from outside your household with handshakes, fist or elbow bumps, and/or hugs will not be allowed.
3. While on campus, you will wear a mask at all times. If you do not bring one with you, one will be provided.
4. During worship, the congregation will not sing or speak as a group, and all worshipers will be expected to cooperate with this requirement.
5. Restrooms will not be available during worship except in an emergency. Please see additional information on this page.
6. We encourage you to bring your own water with you to worship. Small bottles will be available for those who did not bring their own and can be obtained by asking an usher.
7. If you bring your offering with you, you may place it in the offering basket provided either before or after worship. As always, we encourage you to use our online giving processes available from our website and our Church Center app.

**What About...**

- Unexpected Worshipers?** Unexpected worshipers are those who do not have a reservation to attend in-person worship. These worshipers will be warmly welcomed and advised that we will do everything we can to accommodate them while maintaining our attendance limitations.
- Unexpected Guests?** As a welcoming church, we never want to turn first time guests away from any worship service. Therefore, we will set aside several reservation spots every Sunday for unexpected guests who might attend our in-person outdoor worship services. When they arrive, we will make sure they are equipped with masks and will give them a Guest Registration Card as well as a blank *Return to In-Person Worship Covenant* form, both of which they will be asked to complete and return to an usher by the end of the service. Since it is unlikely they will have brought their own chairs, we will provide them with chairs from our Sanctuary, which they will be instructed to leave in place at the end of the service so they can be sanitized by our team of volunteers.
- Non-Compliant Worshipers?** Anyone who refuses to comply with our personal protection measures as indicated in our RIW Plan will be asked in a Christian and respectful manner to comply with our in-person worship requirements. If they will not comply, they will be asked to leave and join us for worship online. If they refuse to leave, the Pastor will end the service and the congregation will be sent home. If we continue to experience non-compliance with our safety protocols, we will discontinue in-person worship until a future date to be determined.

**What Else Do I Need To Know?**

Since our first priority is to keep everyone safe and healthy, there are several things we want you to know:

- If you are feeling sick, please stay home and join us for worship online, even if you have a reservation. If it's too late for you to cancel your reservation using the online system, don't worry. You can either call the church office or, better yet, send us an email and let us know so we can try to give your space to someone else.
- If you get sick after attending in-person worship, please contact the church office immediately at 480-641-1200 or Pastor Jody directly at 480-766-9272, especially if you are diagnosed with COVID-19.
- If someone who attended in-person worship tests positive for COVID-19, the church will notify those who attended the same in-person worship service as the infected person while protecting that person's privacy. Those who attended the same in-person service will be strongly encouraged to be tested and to self-quarantine for at least 2 weeks after exposure. In-person worship will also be suspended for at least 2 weeks following notification of a positive COVID-19 test.
- Hand sanitizer will be available for worshipers to use while on the church campus. We strongly encourage everyone to use hand sanitizer to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

**Temporary Worship Schedule  
Beginning April 11, 2021^**

**8:30-9:15 AM In-Person Worship\***  
**9:45-10:45 AM Online Worship\*\***

**^This temporary schedule will remain in force until we are safely able to return to our regular 3-service worship schedule**

**\*Subject to COVID-19 cases in the area surrounding Song of Life UMC**

**\*\*If in-person worship is cancelled, we will return to our 9:30 Online Worship start time**

**How Can I Get the Church Center App?**



Song of Life UMC's app is a powerful tool that lets you update your personal information, give a financial gift, update your financial giving info, and register your Sunday attendance, all in a secure online environment.

If you already have our app on your phone, you may not know you will be able to make your in-person worship reservations using our app as well. See below for more information about that.

If you have a smartphone and don't already have our app, here are instructions you need to get it:

- On your phone, go to the App Store (for iPhones) or Google Play (for Android Phones). Search for "church center app" and locate the "Church Center App" with the icon shown above. Download the app to your phone.
- Open the app and click on "Get Started." Search for Song of Life UMC. When found, confirm by tapping "This is my church."
- Log in by entering your mobile phone number, then tap "Next." Confirm your registration by entering the 6-digit code texted to your phone, then tap "Next."
- Once you are registered, explore the app!

**To Register Your Attendance on Sunday Mornings:**

- Open the app up to 15 minutes before the start of the worship service, then tap "Check-in" at the screen.
- Look for the name of the service you are attending. Select it and a screen showing your profile will display. Tap on your profile (along with any other family members attending as well).
- Tap "Next" and complete your attendance registration by following the prompts.

**To Update Your Membership Record:**

- Open the app and tap on the icon in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. (If you have added your picture to our system, the icon will be your picture.)
- Tap on your name to open the "Edit Profile" function.
- To add your picture (please do!) tap on the circle labeled "Update Photo." You can either take a selfie using your phone or choose a photo from your phone's photo library.
- Add or change your name, address, phone, marital status, birthday & anniversary dates, etc by tapping on the field to be changed.

**To Give a Financial Gift:**

- Open the app and tap on "Give" at the bottom of your screen.
- On the next screen, indicate the amount you wish to give and tap "Next."
- Choose the fund to which you want to contribute and the frequency by tapping on the down arrows.
- If this is your first time making an electronic gift, you will have to set up your payment method by following the prompts. Otherwise, choose your Payment Method and tap on "Next."

**To Make a Reservation for In-Person Worship:**

- Open the app and tap on "More" at the bottom of your screen.
- Tap on "Events." If an event is available, it will show up on the next screen. This is where the online worship services will display. Tap on the Event for which you would like to add a reservation.
- On the next screen, Confirm the date and time shown is the one you want to reserve. Tap on "Register."
- On the next screen, under "What are you signing up for?," next to the word "Standard," indicate the number of people in your family who will attend

## Survey Q&A

We want to thank all who completed our recent *Possible Return to In-Person Worship Survey*. We received 63 completed surveys representing 111 people, and while a majority of those responding indicated a desire to return to in-person worship, some expressed concerns, asked questions, and offered suggestions, some of which the Leadership Board considered during its March meeting when the Board voted to move forward with offering Outdoor In-Person Worship beginning April 4, 2021 (Easter Sunday), subject to COVID-19 cases remaining low in the Queen Creek/San Tan Valley/Gilbert/SE Mesa area. On this page, we are sharing these questions and concerns and our responses. If you have questions or concerns that have not been shared here, please contact us at [info@songoflifeumc.org](mailto:info@songoflifeumc.org). Our desire is for everyone to be as comfortable as possible with the decisions that have been made.

### **Question: Would it be possible to offer the Outdoor Service after the Online Service? We're concerned about the outside temperature, that it might be too cold OR we would rather not attend an early service.**

When the Leadership Board considered the proposed worship schedules, they discussed the possibility of offering Online Worship at 8:00 AM and Outdoor In-Person Worship at 9:30 AM. After some discussion, the Board decided to keep the schedule as proposed for the following reasons.

1. We don't yet know how long we will be able to worship outdoors, and when we will be able to transition back inside for in-person worship in our Sanctuary. One thing is sure: once we settle on a schedule, it would be confusing to flip/flop it when the hotter temperatures arrive and it's really uncomfortable to be outside later in the morning.
2. We too are sensitive to our congregation's comfort, so we analyzed the outdoor temperatures in Queen Creek from 2016—2020 for the Sunday dates in April and May. What we found is, while the 8—9 AM temperatures will be in the 60s in April, they will increase to the 70s and low 80s in May. And from 9:30-10:30 AM, the temperatures in April will be in the high-60s to mid-70s, but in May they will increase to the high-70s to high-80s/low-90s. In addition, since the congregation will be seated in direct sunlight on either the concrete patio or asphalt parking lot, it will feel a lot warmer than the actual air temperature. So we believe keeping the outdoor service at the earlier time—starting at 8:30 AM—is the best option. We will, however, do our best to let those attending in-person worship what the temperature is forecasted to be so they can dress accordingly and even bring a blanket if necessary.

### **Question: Why can't the In-Person and Online Services be combined at 9:30 AM?**

There are two important reasons why we cannot combine these two services:

1. First, and most critical, our internet connection is not up to the task of livestreaming from outside. We discovered early on that our DSL connection isn't powerful enough, so we bought a hotspot, which we currently use for our broadcasts. Unfortunately it doesn't offer satisfactory results while outside. Our end-users (that's you) experienced lots of buffering, resulting in a negative worship experience. Long term, we will need to invest in Fiber optic cable, but the cost (\$650/month compared to our current rate of about \$150/month) is not affordable at this time. For this reason, we must broadcast our online worship—whether "live" or pre-recorded—from inside. So why not offer in-person worship indoors? Because we know the safest way for us to come together is outdoors, and we are committed to keeping our members, friends, and guests as safe as possible while also responding to the desire to resume in-person worship. Thus, having two separate services—one in-person outdoors with appropriate safety measures and one online broadcast from inside the building—is the best option for us at this time.
2. Second, livestreaming outdoors isn't feasible because the iPads used as cameras overheat when placed in direct sunlight. They can also fall over if an unexpected wind blows in, and replacing them would be very costly should they be permanently damaged. So our best option is to broadcast our online service from inside the Sanctuary at SoL.

### **Concern: We think it is too soon to be gathering in-person for worship. It's too risky and isn't safe. We think the church should wait until more people are vaccinated and we reach herd immunity.**

We respect those who shared this concern, and we want all of you to know we are also very concerned with keeping people safe, including our members, friends, and guests. That's why we are proceeding very cautiously and reserve the right to change our plans should the COVID-19 caseload in the area around the church increase. One positive development is that 16.23% of the residents in the zip codes around the church have been vaccinated as of the middle of March. We have also been tracking the positive cases in the area and, since mid-February, the 7-day average number of positive cases has been consistently under 50. Should this trend continue, we feel comfortable offering in-person worship outdoors, which nearly all medical professionals have indicated is the safest way for people to gather. Furthermore, in compliance with our *Return to In-Person Worship Plan*, which was approved by the Leadership Board last Fall, we will also enforce the following precautions:

1. All persons attending in-person worship, including worship leaders and volunteers, will be required to wear masks; physically distance at least 6' away from those outside their household; and refrain from corporate singing and speaking, as well as handshaking, hugging, and holding hands with those outside their household.
2. Access to the buildings will be restricted to staff and authorized volunteers, with the exception of the restrooms, which may be used by members of the congregation in the event of an emergency or urgent situation. Only one person will be allowed in each restroom at a time (exception: a child may be accompanied by a parent), and that person will sanitize the room according to the instructions posted and using supplies provided by the church.
3. Fellowship and socializing with those outside one's household both before and after worship will not be allowed. Those attending will bring their own chairs, will be directed to their seating area and expected to stay there until they are dismissed, at which time they will go directly to their cars.
4. Those registered to attend in-person worship who become ill, either with COVID-19 or something else, will stay home. If someone becomes ill with COVID-19 after attending an in-person worship service will notify the church immediately upon being diagnosed and those attending the safe service will be instructed to quarantine for 14 days following exposure. Future in-person worship services will be cancelled and only online worship will be offered for at least 2 weeks following the exposure.
5. If the 7-day average number of positive cases per day rise above 50 and remain at higher levels for 5-7 days in a row, in-person worship will be cancelled and we will resume offering only online worship.

The bottom line is this: We will continue to be prayerfully guided by the science and medical community, including the CDC, and will continue to urge people to protect themselves and others by cooperating with mitigating procedures, such as wearing a mask, staying physically distanced, frequently washing our hands, and getting vaccinated at the appropriate time so our positive cases will remain low. We will continue monitoring positive cases in our area and will stop offering in-person worship if warranted. We ask that all of you continue to pray for our community and our church as we take this important step in the life of our church.