



Presbytery of San José

December 5, 2025
First Week of Advent

A Pastoral Letter to the Presbytery of San José **Joy as Resistance**

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

Grace and peace in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. These are anxious times. Holidays have a way of increasing our stress about upcoming gatherings, meal planning, gift buying/giving/wrapping, travels. As well, holidays magnify the loss and absence of loved ones. And it also doesn't help that the daylight is shorter and the weather is colder. I get. Been there, am there, and will be there.

In the midst of it all, we hold in our heart the promise of joy, the gift of joy, joy as resistance. Recently, I had the opportunity to have a webinar conversation with Minister for Worship and Theology with the United Church of Christ's national setting, The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsey. That conversation was broadcasted live yesterday. I share it with [here](#).

In all things, may the gift of joy fill us with awe, wonder, and delight, even with and in the midst of all that we face and experience. Because there, in the center and circumference of the vagaries and vicissitudes of life, the nuances of our doubt, is the Holy One who is at work, who accompanies us on the journey.

In Joy and Justice,

Neal D. Presa
Executive Presbyter

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#CalledToCommunity
#CommittedToJustice

Upcoming Travels/Preaching of our Executive Presbyter

- December 11-26: Vacation
- January 4, 2026 (10:00am): Preaching at First Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto
- January 10, 2026 (10:45am): Attending installation of The Rev. Jason Barraca as Designated Pastor, Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church-Salinas
- January 26-28, 2026: Lead, Presbytery Clergy Retreat at Villa Maria Del Mar, Santa Cruz
- January 29-February 1, 2026: Strategic Planning Meeting and Installation of the General Secretary, World Communion of Reformed Churches at Hannover, Germany



2025 Advent-Christmas Devotional

We are in the sacred season of Advent.

Teaching and ruling elders of the Presbytery contributed their reflections and prayers for this year's devotional booklet based on the Scripture passages of the lectionary.

To access the devotional booklet and to share with others: [click here](#)



Presbyterian minister, the late Rev. Frederick Buechner, famously observed on the nature of vocation and a Christian's calling to serve: "Calling is where the heart's deep gladness and where the world's deep hunger meet."

Are you or someone you know being called to serve in the Presbytery or in one of our churches?

The Search Committee for our next Stated Clerk has begun its work. See the Ministry Discernment Profile [here](#). Share this with your networks.

The Presbytery is also hiring for three new positions:

- Executive Assistant
- Communications Coordinator
- Peacemaking & Justice Advocate.

Also, Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church is looking to hire their next Director of Music.

This is an exciting time to be a part of God's mission. Please pray for all these search and hiring processes, for all those involved, and for the persons whom the Holy Spirit is already preparing to serve in these ministry calls.

To learn more about all these employment opportunities, please [click here](#).



Winter 2026 Clergy Retreat

Church Health & Growth Working Group and EP Neal Presa invite all teaching elders for our Winter 2026 Clergy Retreat, which will be held on January 26-28, 2026 at Villa Maria del Mar in Santa Cruz. This will be a 2-night/3-day gathering. We will focus on the theme "Joy in These Anxious Times" based on EP Neal Presa's book *Worship, Justice, and Joy: A Liturgical Pilgrimage*

Overnight registration is \$200; Commuter registration is \$100.

Register by December 25 [here](#)

There are limited slots, so register soon. Looking forward to seeing there!



A Thought on Mental Health and Faith from Pastor Sharon LeClaire

Major Depression or the Blues?

In earlier articles I have written about SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder, that is depression when there is less light outside in the fall and winter. It usually lifts as spring comes and the rhythms of the brain reset.

What about depression that comes anytime for any reason, no reason at all, and can last for weeks, months or even years? This is called Major Depression and is considered a “Serious Brain Illness.” It is more than “the blues;” it has specific symptoms, is very severe and can even lead to self-harm. Of the nine symptoms, at least five must be present for two weeks or more.

1. Depressed mood;
2. Less sense of pleasure;
3. Significant weight loss/gain;
4. Too little or too much sleep;
5. Restlessness or slowing down;
6. Fatigue;
7. Feeling Worthless or guilt;
8. Hard to think or concentrate; and
9. Thoughts of suicide.

For this disorder, medication and talk therapy are recommended and measures to keep the sufferer safe.

As Christians, what can we do for ourselves or loved one with Major Depression? Prayer... number one, even if we are doubting or afraid. Reading scripture can be difficult but necessary; even reading stories that we know well just to keep the flow of the Message coming. Getting up and attending worship can be crucial so that we are reminded of the community to which we belong.

Major Depression is hard. Hard things need to be taken to God. Don't be afraid, He is always holding you.

If you need support, here are some channels:

- Teaching Elders/Ministers in the Presbytery, can contact Neal Presa, Executive Presbyter and he will connect you to the Pastors Supporting Pastors (PSP) program.
- As well, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefit through the Board of Pensions for six free 1-hour sessions with a licensed therapist and unlimited 24/7 crisis counselor phone calls.
- For anyone (clergy and anyone) experiencing suicidal ideation, you should immediately contact 988 or 911. Blessings



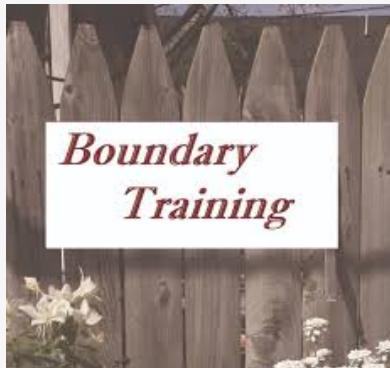
2026 Minimum Effective Salaries

For all pastors and clerks of Sessions: as your Session plans for the 2026 budget, please note the 2026 minimum effective salaries for full-time pastors, for each county of our Presbytery:

Santa Clara \$121,157
Santa Cruz \$101,536
Monterey \$74,349

This is based on the recently announced 2.8% COLA from the Social Security Administration.

If you have any questions, please contact COM Chair Lizanne Reynolds, Stated Clerk Erica Rader, or EP Neal Presa.



Boundary Training for Clergy

All teaching elders of the Presbytery are required to take Boundary Training and submit a certification of completion. You can fulfill this important requirement either through an online course for Clergy Ethics and Congregational Boundaries as the Presbytery has renewed our account with SafeGatherings.com. Or you can attend an in-person session with our colleague The Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow, with dates for 2026 being scheduled.

Please be in touch with Stated Clerk Erica Rader or EP Neal Presa to access any of these options

RESOURCES AND NEWS

- **Immigration Justice**

At a recent online meeting of mid-council leaders (execs/clerks) of the Synod of the Pacific with Amanda Craft, Manager of Immigration Advocacy for the PC(USA), the following resources were provided to assist congregations with accompanying, advocating for, and supporting immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and their families. Access those resources [here](#)



- **Special Offerings**

In that same meeting, mid-council leaders from the Synod met with The Rev. John Wilkinson, Vice President of Stewardship and Funds Development for the PC(USA), as he shared about the three special offerings -- One Great Hour of Sharing, World Communion, and the Christmas Joy Offering. There's a new grant program to support congregations and worshipping communities funded by the World Communion offering. To learn more about these special offerings and the grant program, click [here](#)

- **228th General Assembly (2028)**

Commissioners and advisory delegates to next year's 227th General Assembly (2026) in Milwaukee will consider a proposal from the Unification Commission to have the 228th General Assembly (2028) in Puerto Rico, at the invitation of the Synod of Boriquen and the three presbyteries of that Synod. This would be a

historic gathering as this would be the first General Assembly, if the way be clear, to be meet outside of the contiguous United States. Read the news story [here](#)



The recent federal government shutdown has affected millions of Americans who rely upon SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) to procure basic food for themselves and their loved ones, and thousands of food pantries across the country which rely upon SNAP funding to stock their food supply.

Our Presbytery Hunger Advocate, [The Rev. Ryan Althaus](#), together with The Rev. Rebecca Barnes (Manager, Presbyterian Hunger Program of the PC(USA) Unified Agency), have some valuable resources to help support our local communities. Here's a word from Ryan, a list of local resources, and at the bottom of his note are links to some of those resources. [Click Here.](#)



Is your church's story being told?
Share it today in the Mission
Yearbook!

We're collecting stories for the Mission Yearbook website and want to feature yours! Share how God is moving in your congregation, through ministry, mission, or spiritual growth and inspire others across the Presbyterian community.

Send 300–600 words, a photo or link to a video, whatever you have to MissionYearbookStories@pcusa.org. Find all the details here: <https://hubs.ly/Q03z9ch0>

If you have a preferred timeframe in mind when you would like your story to run, please submit at least 4 weeks before your preferred date.



Presbytery Unity Candle Sunday, December 7: Stone Church-Willow Glen

This coming Sunday, please pray for Stone Church of Willow Glen, their transitional pastor, The Rev. Fred Harrell, and for their forthcoming PNC as they discern whom the Holy Spirit is preparing to serve as their next installed pastor.

Since 1947, Stone Church has been a landmark on Lincoln Avenue, just blocks away from Downtown Willow Glen and Willow Glen Middle and High School. They engage with a variety of community ministries and organizations, including Willow Glen Cares and People Acting In Community Together, to support the diverse and growing community that surrounds the church.

Sunday worship is at 9:30am.

Stone Church of Willow Glen's website is [here](#)

Follow the path of the Unity Candle: <http://tinyurl.com/SJUnity2025>

Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of San Jose celebrate their

*19th Annual
Epiphany Tea
at Stone Church of Willow Glen
Sunday, January 4th, 2026 at 2 PM*

1937 Lincoln Ave, San Jose, CA

And you are invited! RSVP by December 28, 2025
to Rosaleen Zisch, rmgzisch@gmail.com



Begin the New Year with food for body and soul.

All are warmly invited to join Presbyterian Women for tea and cake, followed by candlelit worship in the style of the Taizé Community: chanted song in prayer, meditation on scripture and seasonal readings.



SAVE THE DATE
Asian Presbyterian Women
Northern California Chapter
Winter Gathering

**Gathered in Faith:
Empowering Hearts, Changing Lives**
“For where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.” Matt 18:20

January 31, 2026

9:30am - 3:00pm

LEADERS:

**REV.
RUTH
KUO**

Presbytery of
San José

**REV.
DEBORAH
LEE**

Interfaith Movement
for Human Integrity

**Westhope Presbyterian Church
12850 Saratoga Avenue
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westhope.org

www.sanjosepby.org

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