



Presbytery of San José

May 1st, 2026

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

This week's reflection is once again offered by Colin Richardson, our Communications Coordinator:

This May, as we observe Mental Health Awareness Month, we are invited to consider not only how we speak about mental health, but how we make room for it within the rhythms of our faith. For many, mental wellness can feel deeply personal—shaped by seasons of struggle, caregiving, quiet anxieties, griefs unnamed, or even by the absence of a clear “mental health story” at all. And yet, no matter our past experiences or present circumstances, each of us carries some relationship to our own inner life: to rest, worry, resilience, and the ways we seek peace.

The PC(USA)'s Mental Health Ministry names this work as part of the church's calling to educate and empower congregations, with the hope of expanding awareness, ending stigma, and strengthening the capacity of ministers and congregants to engage mental health with care and understanding. This framing feels especially important because it reminds us that mental health is not separate from the life of faith. It is not a secular concern we reluctantly make space for, but part of what it means to tend honestly to the fullness of our humanity.

Mindfulness, in this sense, need not be understood as something distant from Christian practice. It can be as simple as noticing where we are hurried, where we are holding pain, where we are avoiding stillness, or where we have mistaken endurance for wellness. Prayer, worship, silence, Scripture, community, and service can each become practices of attention—ways of returning ourselves to God with honesty rather than performance. Perhaps this month offers us a gentle opportunity to reflect on how our trust in God might deepen, rather than diminish, our commitment to mental wellness. Moreover, it is an opportunity to speak honestly, listen inwardly, seek support when needed, and remember that grace meets us within our feelings of fear and uncertainty. To care for the mind and spirit is not a departure from faith, but one way of living more fully into the wholeness God desires for each of us.

In Joy & Justice,
Neal

Rev. Neal D. Presa, Ph.D, Executive Presbyter
(408) 763-5004 | Neal@sanjosepby.org

#CalledToCommunity
#CommittedToJustice

Upcoming Travels/Preaching of our Executive Presbyter

- May 2: Officiating Memorial Service of the late Elder Dr. Wilson Tawe, New Jersey
- May 3-8: Mid-Council Leaders Residency Retreat, Maryland
- May 12-13: Keynote Speaker, National Council of Korean Presbyterian Churches, Houston, TX
- May 17: Preach, Stone Church-Willow Glen
- May 23: Ordination of Cory Piña as Minister of Word and Sacrament, 11:00 am, First Presbyterian Church, Monterey
- May 24: Preach, Gonzales Presbyterian Church, 10:00 am

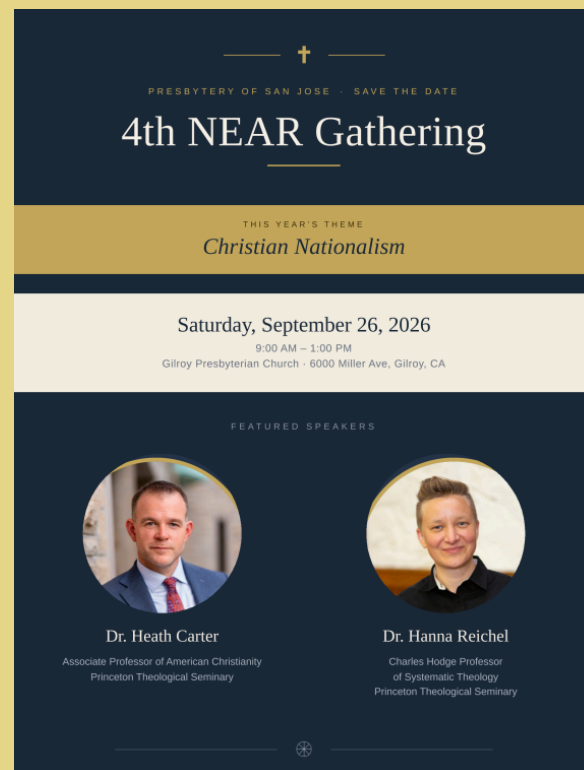
If you would like to invite the EP to guest preach, facilitate a class, lead a retreat, help with strategic visioning/planning, or grab a cup of coffee, email Neal@sanjosepby.org or call/text (408) 763-5004

4th NEAR Gathering Announced! Theme: *Christian Nationalism* w/ Keynote Speakers from Princeton Seminary

The Presbytery is excited to announce plans for the 4th NEAR Gathering, taking place **Saturday, September 26, 2026 (9:00 am to 1:00 pm)** at Gilroy Presbyterian Church.

This year's gathering takes up a pressing and timely theme: Christian Nationalism. The morning will feature two keynote addresses from **Dr. Heath Carter** and **Dr. Hanna Reichel** of Princeton Theological Seminary, followed by small group discussions and an armchair conversation with both speakers moderated by the Executive Presbyter. Drawing on their rigorous scholarship and experience, Drs. Carter and Reichel will offer theological and historical perspectives designed to inform and shape our practical action and prayerful response to Christian Nationalism. Lunch will be provided, along with a light breakfast.

As the Presbytery continues to create space for learning, discernment, and



The flyer is a vertical graphic with a dark blue background. At the top, it features a small white cross icon. Below the cross, the text reads "PRESBYTERY OF SAN JOSE · SAVE THE DATE". The main title "4th NEAR Gathering" is prominently displayed in a large, white, serif font. Underneath the title, a gold horizontal band contains the text "THIS YEAR'S THEME" and "Christian Nationalism" in a smaller, white, serif font. Below this band, the date "Saturday, September 26, 2026" is written in white, followed by the time "9:00 AM - 1:00 PM" and the location "Gilroy Presbyterian Church · 6000 Miller Ave, Gilroy, CA". The bottom section of the flyer is titled "FEATURED SPEAKERS" and contains two circular portrait photos. The first photo is of Dr. Heath Carter, with his name and title "Associate Professor of American Christianity, Princeton Theological Seminary" listed below. The second photo is of Dr. Hanna Reichel, with her name and title "Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary" listed below. A small white cross icon is centered at the very bottom of the flyer.

As the Presbytery continues to create space for learning, discernment, and community, the NEAR Gathering (Nurture, Educate, Advocate, Resource) remains one of

community, the NEAR Gathering remains one of our most vital opportunities to come together across congregations. Additional details, including location and registration information, will be shared in the months ahead.

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Final Reminder:
Treasurer's Training
May 2nd, 9:30am-12:00pm

Our Presbytery Treasurer, Rev. Edd Breeden, will facilitate an annual workshop that covers the fundamentals of serving as a church treasurer, a finance chair or on a church finance committee. The workshop will be held in-person on Saturday, May 2 from 9:30am-12:00pm at the chapel of the Presbytery Office/Cornerstone Church of Silicon Valley at 890 Meridian Way in San José.



Registration is still open at [this link](#).

The event is free. Your per capita and mission dollars at work.

This training offers an opportunity to strengthen financial leadership within congregations by reviewing current developments in church finance and reinforcing core responsibilities of church treasurers and finance committees. Designed to be both practical and informative, the session is open and beneficial to pastors, church treasurers, elders, and finance committee members throughout the presbytery.

For more information, contact Edd at: Edd@sanjosepby.org or (831) 239-6817

Ministry Spotlight



MEET THE PRESBYTERY

Grace Kaori Suzuki

Stated Clerk



Ask the Rev. Dr. Grace Kaori Suzuki how she sees the work of a Stated Clerk, and she returns to a single conviction: rules and process "are meant to help give structure to the ministries... not something meant to be used to punish people." It's a posture you can see in practice already. When a pastor called recently with a question about remote baptism — something the Book of Order doesn't speak to explicitly — Grace did what she tends to do in those moments. She had a conversation. The two of them worked through it together, came to a conclusion they could both live with, and moved on. "Sometimes it's the why that's more important," she says. "When you get to the why, then it gives you ways to navigate."

A native of Japan and the daughter of two pastors, Grace literally grew up in the church — her family lived on the second floor of the building where her parents

served, and on Sundays, her bedrooms became Sunday school rooms. The family came to the United States when she was five and returned to Japan during her school years, a back-and-forth that she credits her faith with carrying her through. Grace came back to the U.S. for college, studying piano performance at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music before being called into ministry. She would go on to serve for over twenty years as pastor and head of staff at Christ United Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, eventually completing her Doctor of Ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary with an emphasis in executive leadership — a focus that would prove fitting in the years to come.

The path to Stated Clerk wasn't planned so much as recognized. Even while pastoring at Christ United, Grace volunteered extensively with the Presbytery of San Francisco — serving on a range of committees and administrative commissions, and stepping in for a six-month term as bridge executive during a recent season of transition. She loved it. "I always had this fascination toward middle governing body work," she says — the chance to support not one congregation but many, to walk alongside pastors through transitions and challenges. Encouraged by a friend to apply for the Stated Clerk role in San Jose earlier this year, things moved quickly. She read the speed of it as a sign.

"Sometimes it's the why that's more important. When you get to the why, then it gives you ways to navigate."

— Grace Kaori Suzuki

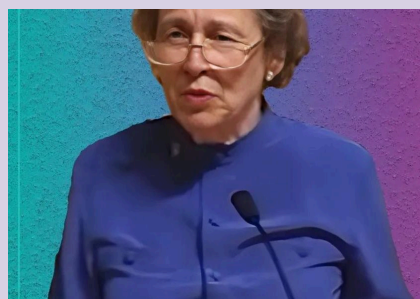
Some have framed her move as a step up the ladder, though Grace doesn't view it that way. It's simply, she says, "a very different way of doing ministry." Where the role does ask something distinctive of her is in its bearing — the Book of Order names the Stated Clerk's work in normative terms, asking that it be carried out with neutrality, fairness, and care with power. Twenty years on the receiving end of presbytery decisions, as a pastor herself, taught her how much the why behind a rule matters — and how often that discourse can do what enforcement can't.

She steps into the role with a clear sense of what it asks, and is already at work shaping the partnership ahead with Neal — finding the rhythm between two complementary roles. What she brings to the office on day one is already clear enough: a pastor's experience leading at every level of the church, a conviction that polity is meant to support ministry rather than to discipline it, and — somewhere in the background — a musician's training, the kind that teaches you a faithful performance is built slowly, one phrase at a time.

Grace Kaori can be reached at gracekaori@sanjosepby.org for questions related to the Stated Clerk's office. Meet the Presbytery is a recurring feature spotlighting members of our community; if there's someone you'd like to see featured, write to colin@sanjosepby.org.

An Endowed Chair for Mitzi Henderson

In March, McCormick Theological Seminary announced a \$1 million gift establishing the **Mitzi Gebhard Henderson Endowed Chair** — a fitting tribute to one of our own. Mitzi, a longtime member and Ruling Elder at First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto, has dedicated her life to LGBTQIA+ equality, religious education, and faithful church leadership, including service as a trustee of McCormick Seminary. The chair will support a scholar-practitioner working across justice, equity, and pastoral practice. McCormick



To learn more about this generous gift, visit mccormick.edu/news/mitzihendersonchair or read the **Presbyterian News Service** story. For a deeper introduction to Mitzi's advocacy

officials describe it as "more than an academic appointment...a formation engine that will keep McCormick nimble to the Spirit and responsive to the world God loves."

in her own words, we encourage you to watch her [1997 PFLAG Talks address at the San Francisco Public Library](#).

Staff Spotlight

The Presbytery of San Jose is pleased to announce the appointment of **Colin Richardson** to the role of Communications and Executive Support Associate, effective May 1st, 2026.

"The Personnel Committee and I are pleased to promote Colin Richardson to the position of Communications and Executive Support Associate. In a short time, Colin has demonstrated a can-do attitude that is dependable, trustworthy, kind, and effective. We are grateful he has accepted the invitation to serve the Presbytery in this role, where he will work closely with me and the Stated Clerk in supporting the ministries of the Presbytery."

— EP Neal Presa

In this expanded role, Colin will continue his work as Communications Coordinator while additionally providing support to the Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk. For communications needs or anything else related to this role, Colin can be reached at Colin@sanjosepby.org.

SAVE THE DATE!

Mission and Outreach Working Group Roundtable Gathering Saturday, June 13 at 11:30 a.m.

Save the date for a roundtable gathering hosted by the Mission and Outreach Working Group (MAOWG). Mission committee chairpersons and members from across our presbytery are invited to come together for conversation, connection, and encouragement.

Join us for a potluck luncheon and discussion time to share the joys and challenges of mission work within our congregations. It will be an opportunity to learn from one another's experiences and strengthen our shared ministry. Sandwiches and beverages will be provided. Attendees are welcome (but not required) to bring a salad, chips, or dessert to share.

MAOWG also hopes to compile a current list of mission chairpersons and their contact information from each congregation. This will help us communicate about upcoming events, available grant money, and future mission trips.

Please **RSVP** to **Pam Siu** (Chair of the Mission and Outreach Working Group) by June 1 with the name(s) of those attending from your church. You can also contact Pam for more information or to provide mission chairperson's contact information here: thesiufamily@yahoo.com.



**Third Thursday Film Night:
The Voice of Hind Rajab
Westhope Presbyterian Church
Thursday, May 21 at 6:00 pm**

Westhope Presbyterian Church warmly invites members and friends to an evening of meaningful film and reflection. Each month, Westhope's Third Thursday Film series gathers the community around stories of Social Justice in hopes of sparking meaningful conversation. This month's selection is *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, nominated for Best International Feature Film at this year's Academy Awards.



On January 29, 2024, Red Crescent volunteers received an emergency call. A five-year-old girl was trapped in a car under fire in Gaza, pleading for rescue. As they worked to dispatch an ambulance, they did everything they could to keep her on the line. Her name was Hind Rajab.

Doors open at 6:00 p.m., and the film begins at 6:30 p.m. at Westhope Presbyterian Church. All are welcome.

To register and find more information, visit their [website here](https://westhope.org/justice).

**Leaders of Color Retreat
Zephyr Point Conference Center
October 19-22, 2026**

Mark your calendar for the Leaders of Color Retreat 2026, our annual gathering of encouragement and renewal, taking place October 19–22, 2026, at the beautiful Zephyr Point Conference Center.

Set along the peaceful shores of Lake Tahoe, this retreat continues an annual tradition of creating sacred space to strengthen relationships, share wisdom, and sustain one another in ministry through fellowship and reflection.

This event welcomes all clergy of color and church leaders of color within the Presbyteries of San Jose, San Francisco, Redwoods, and North Central California are warmly invited to register and take part in this meaningful time together.

Registration details and additional information will be shared in the months ahead.



Clergy Reminders

Upcoming Stated Presbytery Meeting:

Thursday, November 5, 2026 at 5:00 pm (via Zoom)

Elders & Congregants of the Presbytery are once again invited to our upcoming bi-annual Stated Presbytery Meeting — highlighting worship, shared discernment, and the business of our common life together.

Registration & More Info to come. We hope to see you there.

Save the Date!
Fall 2026 Clergy Retreat
October 28th-29th, 2026

A friendly reminder to clergy across the Presbytery of San Jose to save the date for our upcoming Clergy Retreat, taking place October 28–29 at St. Francis Conference Center in San Juan Bautista (one night, two days).

This gathering offers teaching and ruling elders a meaningful time set apart for reflection, fellowship, and shared learning in our ministries and callings.

More information and registration details will be shared soon!



Presbytery Unity Candle: Week of Sunday, May 3rd

St. Philips Presbyterian Church

This week, we invite you to pray for the ministry of St. Philip's United Presbyterian Church, along with Ruling Elder Sonia Sabillo, moderator of the Session, Rev. Andy Rausch, and all who give their time and gifts to sustain its faithful life of worship, fellowship, and service within the community.

St. Philip's is a small but ever-growing Filipino American congregation located in the heart of Salinas. Rooted in faith, community, and a spirit of welcome, the congregation continues to offer a meaningful church home for those gathered in worship and shared life. Service is often held at Northminster Presbyterian Church, a neighboring congregation. In the same spirit of community, Rev. Andy Rausch often preaches at St. Philips and serves as Minister for the celebration of Communion. Throughout its presence and ministry, St. Philip's reflects the strength

of a close-knit congregation whose witness is shaped by prayer, cultural heritage, and care for one another.

As our neighbors to the South continue to grow in their ministry, we give thanks for the steadfast leadership of its leadership and for all those who help nurture this dedicated congregation as it finds new ways to support its neighbors and, likewise, inspire its members.

To learn more about St. Philips, you can contact Ruling Elder Sonia here: soniaestess@yahoo.com

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

Pieces on Peace

Veronica Ota, Peacemaking & Justice Advocate



May Edition

“Social Justice” can be a tricky subject, especially for churches. As “Peacemaking and Justice Advocate,” I’ve seen how my job title elicits varied responses. For some, my role evokes excitement and a desire to connect, for others; there is wariness and skepticism about any agenda I might be pushing. I believe a major part of my job is to help our church leaders, members, and communities understand that the Church is already involved in the work of restorative justice and peacemaking, as we are under Christ’s leadership and seek to proclaim, as Jesus did, good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, and liberation for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Our political leanings may cause disagreements on how to work towards these ends, but our faith should nonetheless make these concerns central to our lives.

A meeting with Rev. Andy Wong of Foothill Community Presbyterian Church helped affirm how community organizing and social justice work align with the gospel message and vision. Pastors Andy and Lindsay and some members of FCPC are actively involved with Silicon Valley Allied for the Common Good, a “non-partisan network of civic associations, faith-based organizations and nonprofits that come together to effect change... [and] help regular people have a seat at the decision-making tables of Silicon Valley.” The emphasis of this group is building relationships through one-on-one meetings. Through the ongoing process of getting to know one another, our stories reveal our concerns and passions, as well as our wisdom and strength. Empowered relationally, we can then work together effectively to address problems in our communities.

When Andy is questioned about how this kind of grassroots organizing fits into “church,” he explains that community organizing is about three things: relationships, leaders, and power. When we build relationships, we value and validate each other’s life experiences. In this way, new leaders are empowered to emerge, recognizing the importance of their story and the power they hold to be part of the change they desire to see. When networks of empowered everyday leaders strengthen, we have the power to effect meaningful change. As Andy put it, “What church doesn’t want to build relationships, leaders, and power?”

Jesus commands us to be in loving **relationship** with God and neighbor, and empowers us to be **leaders** in the Church, the body of Christ, sharing the good

news of Christ's redemptive love with the world. The gospel envisions a changed world, and Christ offers us the **power** to pray for and participate in the building of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Our churches and leaders might not all be called to community organizing, but we can grow our relationships with individuals and groups working to encourage local leaders in order to support the empowerment of all God's children – and that is the work of peacemaking and justice.

If your congregation or community is engaged in a peace- or justice-centered ministry, launching a new initiative, or has a story worth sharing, you can contact Veronica at veronica@sanjosephy.org

A Place at the Table

Offerings from Rev. Ryan Althaus,
Hunger Advocate



To learn more and stay connected to this work, we invite you to visit **Ryan's website** — a growing hub of reflections, resources, and updates on ongoing projects happening across our community

For ongoing reflections and resources in the meantime, visit Rev. Althaus's hunger advocacy blog [here](#). or feel free to contact him directly at: ryan@sanjosephy.org

May Spotlight: Common Roots Farms

Several years ago I joined the Common Root crew and got the farm listed as a national pcusa hunger site. I've hosted a number of our congregations out there and regularly lead tours and such of the farm coupled with lessons on organic food, disabilities & gardening. Every year the farm offers a CSA program as a means of funding the program and sharing some really amazing organic produce and flowers. If congregants want to participate or churches would like to use common roots for their flower needs, let me know, and i can put together a private tour.

CSA Farm shares are still available for the 2026 season, and members of our Community Supported Agriculture program receive a weekly farm share for 24 weeks. Shares begin May 5th and end with the last share on October 16th.

Each week, you'll get a curated selection of in-season produce and flowers — harvested at peak freshness. Crops we are excited about include strawberries, sweet peppers, little gem lettuces, tomatoes, pole beans, summer squash, dahlias, celosia, sunflowers, and more.

Choosing [Common Roots Farm's CSA](#) means more than just fresh, local produce and blooms — it's a direct investment in our inclusive farm where people with disabilities gain skills, jobs, and a sense of belonging. Every farm share supports hands-on training, internships, regenerative stewardship, and community.



Employment Opportunities May 2026

The Presbytery invites prayers and attention to the following congregations as they seek to fill ministry positions:

First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto

- [Guitarist/ Song Leader](#)

First Presbyterian Church of Santa Clara

- [Executive Administrator](#)
- [Nursery/ Childcare Worker](#)

Presbytery-affiliated organizations looking to fill positions:

Westminster Woods

- [Interim Executive Director](#)

To learn more about these opportunities and the process to apply, visit the Presbytery's Employment page [here](#).

WORK GROUP SPOTLIGHT: LEGAL AID INITIATIVE

One month left to make a difference for your immigrant neighbors

Initiative ends Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2026

\$30,000+
raised so far

120+
donors

\$15,000
matching funds unlocked

Give Through May 24

According to a 2025 report by the American Immigration Council, **without legal representation** at immigration court proceedings, people in our Presbytery face a **70% chance of being deported** — often erroneously.

YOUR GIVING SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS



Amigos de Guadalupe

Providing legal support and advocacy for immigrant communities in Santa Clara County through the Rapid Response Network.



Community Action Board of Santa Cruz

Connecting immigrants in Santa Cruz County with legal counsel and direct advocacy to ensure fair representation in court.

How to Contribute

Give to Amigos de Guadalupe

Visit the Link (above) & Select "Presbytery of San José Donor – RRN Legal Services / Family Support" to direct your gift

Give to Community Action Board

Visit the Link Above & Select "Presbytery of San José Donor - SCCIP – Immigration Legal Services" to direct your gift.

More ways to donate to CAB:

- Mail a check to: 406 Main Street, Suite 207, Watsonville, CA 95016
- Drop off cash at their 406 Main Street office (2nd floor reception)
- For stock donations, contact CAB's CFO directly at lorettaz@cabinc.org

A special presentation is coming

With over \$15,000 raised, our contributors have successfully secured matching funds pledged by the Peace and Justice Working Group. To honor the organizations that made this possible, the Presbytery will present ceremonial checks to both organizations -each in the amount of \$7,500- following the fundraiser deadline on Pentecost Sunday, May 24. Details to come soon.

For questions about the initiative or more ways to give, contact any of the following:
EP Neal Presa, Westhope Presbyterian Church pastor The Rev. Erik Swanson (esfishrev@gmail.com), Peace and Justice Working Group co-chairs The Rev. Julie Porras-Center (pastorjulie@somoswatsonville.com) and Beth Wylie (bethwylie21@gmail.com).

www.sanjosepby.org

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