



Presbytery of San José

May 8th, 2026

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

Grace and peace to you in the midst of our life together as the Church.
This week's reflection is once again offered by Colin Richardson, our Communications and Executive Support Associate:

This coming Sunday, many across our communities will celebrate Mother's Day — a national holiday that invites us to pause and give thanks for the mothers, caregivers, and mother figures whose love has helped shape and steady our lives. Though not a religious holiday in the formal sense, Sunday carries deep spiritual resonance for all who care to acknowledge it: gratitude, sacrifice, and the kind of faithful care that often reflects the love of God in ordinary, embodied ways.

Proverbs 31 offers language that feels especially fitting for this day, honoring one clothed in “strength and dignity,” whose wisdom and faithfulness bless those around her. The passage concludes with a beautiful image of recognition: “Her children rise up and call her blessed.” On Mother's Day, we might hear “children” broadly — as all those who have been raised, guided, or held steady by another's love, whether through family, friendship, church, or chosen community.

There is something both admirable and ineffectual about setting aside one day to honor a lifetime of dedication. One day can never fully account for the sacrifices made, lessons taught, prayers offered, or quiet love given in moments no one else saw. So much of mothering work — in all its forms — happens consistently and almost entirely without the recognition it deserves.

Perhaps this day, then, is not only an occasion for gratitude, but an invitation to pay better attention and to name the care we have received. To make this appreciation known while we can. To honor not only mothers, but all who have taken on the sacred work of maternal guidance: sisters, aunts, mentors, and neighbors. A day such as this should also serve as a witness to those who are childfree, who never knew their mother, or who have since been estranged.

Given the opportunity in the days to come, attempt to find a concrete way to express gratitude to one of these individuals. In this way, acknowledgement becomes more than a Hallmark gesture, but rather progress toward a deeper mindset for how we remember the unseen labors of love that reflect God's steadfast care in the life we have been gifted.

In Joy & Justice,

Neal

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

#CalledToCommunity
#CommittedToJustice

Upcoming Travels & Preaching

May 12-13: Keynote Speaker, National Council of Korean Presbyterian Churches — Houston, TX

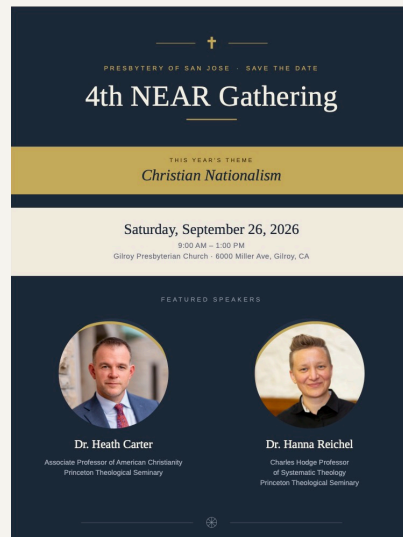
May 17: Preach — Stone Church-Willow Glen

May 23: Ordination of Cory Piña as Minister of Word and Sacrament, 11:00 am— First Presbyterian Church, Monterey

May 24: Preach, 10:00 am — Gonzales Presbyterian Church

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@sanjosephby.org or call/text (408) 763-5004.

4th NEAR Gathering + Save the Date



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

This year's theme is **Christian Nationalism**. The morning will feature 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 scholarship, Drs. Carter and Reichel will offer theological and historical perspectives to shape our practical action and prayerful response to this topic. A light breakfast and lunch will be provided. Registration details will be shared in the weeks ahead.

As the Presbytery continues to create space for learning, discernment, and community, the NEAR Gathering (*Nurture, Educate, Advocate, Resource*) remains one of our most vital opportunities to come together across congregations.



Stated Clerk **Grace Kaori Suzuki**

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@sanjosepb.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@sanjosepb.org.

Ministry Spotlight

✦ LEGAL AID INITIATIVE

Final weeks 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

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.

How to Contribute



Amigos de Guadalupe

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

**Give to Amigos de
Guadalupe**

✦ Visit the link & select "Presbytery of San José Donor – RRN Legal Services / Family Support" to direct your gift



Community Action Board of Santa Cruz

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

**Give to Community Action
Board**

✦ Visit the link & 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

Save the Date: A Special Presentation

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 Amigos de Guadalupe and the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County—each in the amount of \$7,500—following the fundraiser deadline on Pentecost Sunday, May 24.

Join us on **Wednesday, May 27 at Westhope Presbyterian Church in Saratoga**, between 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. Exact time and additional details will be announced soon.

*For questions about the initiative or more ways to give, contact any of the following:
EP Neal Presa (neal@sanjosepby.org), 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).*

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 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."

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

Save the Date!

**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. Read a synopsis below:

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](#).



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.

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.

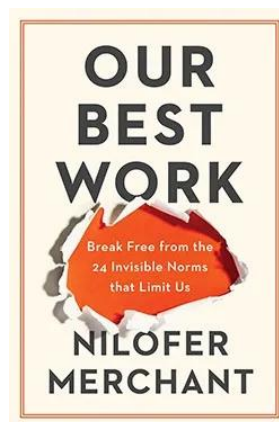
Registration details and additional information will be shared in the months ahead.



**Conversation for Pastors & Faith Leaders:
Hosted by Rev. Dave Watermulder of PCLG
Wednesday, May 20th, at 11:00am**

Join us on May 20th for a conversation with Nilofer Merchant about leadership in church and faith settings, based on her new book *Our Best Work*. Nilofer is a marketplace thought leader, author, and speaker. She is a member of the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos and has served as an Elder. This is a chance to learn more about collaborative leadership, overcoming self-imposed obstacles, and growing into a person who draws others into decision making where it matters most.

This event will be hosted by Pastor Dave Watermulder, and everyone who attends will receive a free copy of the book! The program will be held in the Fireside Room of PCLG on May 20th at 11am, with coffee and treats starting at 10:30am.



To **RSVP** or receive more information, contact: veronica.nourse@pclg.org. Read about Nilofer here and join us as we learn and grow together! <https://nilofermerchant.com/>

Clergy Reminders

Teaching Elders: Share Your Milestone Dates

All Teaching Elders — whether serving in an installed position, member at-large, honorably retired - we are a community of presbyters. One way to do that is to be aware of one another's life milestones and celebrate them.

Please fill out [this form](#) (also found below) and share any of the following: ordination date, birthday, wedding anniversary, or retirement date. While some of this information is in our database profile listings for you, not everyone has it. We'd like to have an updated list, and this will give me an opportunity to connect with you as those sacred dates approach.

Blessings,
EP Neal Presa

**Stated Presbytery Meeting:
Thursday, November 5, 2026 at 5:00
pm**

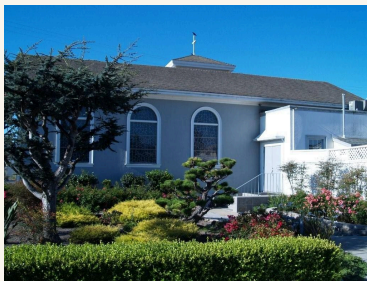
Elders & members of the Presbytery are once again invited to our upcoming bi-annual Stated Presbytery Meeting — highlighting worship, shared discernment, and the business of our common life together.

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

**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!



Unity Candle □

WEEK OF MAY 10TH

Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church

Salinas

This week, we invite you to pray for the ministry of Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church in Salinas, along with their pastoral leadership, the Rev. Jason Barraca (pastor), the Rev. Jim Raines (Parish Associate), and all the volunteers who give their time and gifts to sustain this community of worship and service.

Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church is a small Salinas Valley congregation with more than 100 years of history. Their church family includes a diverse sect of their community, including a majority of Asian American congregants. United by a shared desire to follow Christ and care for one another, their mission is to share the love of Jesus Christ with the world — especially with those who are broken, hurting, or seeking answers to life's questions.

Rooted in the hope of the gospel, Lincoln Avenue "seeks to be a community of healing, restoration, and reconciliation for individuals, families, and the wider Salinas community." They affirm the call to respond to God by serving as God's reconciling community in the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit to share Christ's love in hopes of healing the divisions between God and one another.

Lincoln's service offerings include Sunday School held weekly at 9:30 AM, followed by Sunday Worship at 10:45 AM. All are welcome to join this faithful congregation as they continue their ministry of worship and growth.

Please hold Rev. Barraca and the entire Lincoln Avenue Presbyterian Church family in prayer this week — that their ministry may continue to flourish, and that their witness to healing, restoration, and reconciliation may bear fruit in the community they serve.

To learn more about this week's congregation, you can visit their website here:

<http://www.lapcsalinas.org/>

Follow the path of the Unity Candle here:

<http://tinyurl.com/SJUnity2025>

Pieces on Peace 

MAY EDITION

Everything in one place: related content, advocacy resources, and ways to get involved — all on our [Peacemaking & Justice Advocacy page](#), curated by Veronica.

Veronica Ota · Peacemaking & Justice Advocate

“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@sanjosepby.org

A Place at the Table ☐○☐

SPRING SPOTLIGHT

Rev. Ryan Althaus · Hunger Advocate

Several years ago I joined the Common Roots 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.

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@sanjosepby.org



Employment Opportunities

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](#).

www.sanjosepby.org

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