



Presbytery of San José

July 24, 2026

Theoxenia

*Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

-Hebrews 13:1-2, NRSV



Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

Greetings in the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of the heavenly Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. I hope and pray you, your loved ones, and your respective ministries are flourishing in the love and joy of the Lord. Wherever you are in God's good creation, may you continue to bear witness and embody the goodness and mercy of the Holy One.

My wife and I recently watched Christopher Nolan's epic saga, "The Odyssey." No worry, there won't be any spoiler alerts with this pastoral word. And this is not a full-blown movie review. The movie just debuted, so there will be plenty of time to deconstruct and analyze this film. I'd love to get together over a firepit, at the beach, or a picnic and discuss the movie a few months from now. Near or after the midterm elections might be a good time. We are going to watch it again in an IMAX theater this time because the cinematography and acting are well done.

For now, one word I would sum up the movie: Theoxenia (θεοξένια).

You may say, what?!? Theo, huh? Xenia, eh? No, it's not a Greek dish. No, it's not a skin rash from the hot summer days. Pronounced "th-ee-oh-zee-nee-uh" with the "th" like in "fourth." Theo- meaning god. -xenia meaning stranger, like xenophobia, fear of strangers. Theoxenia is god in strangers. It's an ancient concept in Greco-Roman, Persian/Zoroastrian, and Judeo-Christian traditions. It essentially means that the

divine is in/with strangers, and therefore you should extend hospitality, kindness, and respect to all people. This is not foreign to our faith. Remember the admonition in the New Testament from the Book of Hebrews: Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:1-2). This is a text after the description of Hebrews 12 of “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (12:1), which followed the great roll call of some of the faithful in Hebrews 11 with the litany of the phrase “by faith” to describe how some in that great cloud of witnesses followed the leading of the Lord.

Remember Abraham in Genesis 18 when he unknowingly welcomed three strangers, who at the time he didn’t know were the living God and two angels.

Thus, we know the tale of the Trojan Horse, that ancient gift received by the people of Troy from the Greeks (Mycenaeans) as a supposed tribute to Athena, goddess of wisdom. The detail of the Trojan Horse tale comes to us, not by way of the story of the Odyssey, but by Virgil’s Aeneid. The Trojans receive this giant, wooden gift, wheeling it within their city walls, not knowing that inside lay the trap of Greek soldiers biding their time to remove themselves from the interior of the horse to attack the city of Troy and ransack it.

Sadly, the exercise of theoxenia by the Trojans, giving the benefit of the doubt to the Greeks, resulted in their destruction. The Mycenaeans took advantage of that ancient law, used it to conquer a people, and claim what was not rightfully theirs.

On the negative side, we, of course, should be on our guard against strangers. Thus, we safeguard children. We are wise as serpents when it comes to predatory hackers and those who would hijack our identities. I received several emails and texts from some of you inquiring about whether I had emailed you seeking help and monetary assistance for a charity. Discard, delete, and disregard such messages. . phishing/spam/hackers! We know all too well, quite sadly, that strangers in our midst – whether in person, on the phone, in the digital world – are up to no good. And that, we keep neighborhood watches for each other and with one another.

At the same time, on a planet of 7 billion people, in a country of 350 million people, in a Presbytery of 3300 Presbyterians, we are interconnected. And in the midst of our common humanity, the characteristics and character of God are embodied in ways seen and unseen, in ways both big and small. I see this every week when I worship with and preach at one of your churches. There are many of your fellow congregants whom I have yet to meet. In every instance, I am blessed by the faithfulness of God’s precious children in our churches, such as when I preached at Westhope Presbyterian Church in Saratoga last Sunday and fellowshiped with some amazing folks there. When I had separate lunch meetings with our two retired colleagues Rev. Dale Bracey and Rev. Jack Longley, I met gracious restaurant staff who brightened my day. I think of the time several months ago when I first met Mathias, the music director at Gilroy Presbyterian Church. He’s from Cameroon, and he was summoned to appear at ICE hearing in San Francisco. With our colleague, Rev. Trevor Van Laar, and several members from Gilroy Pres, we accompanied Mathias to downtown San Francisco, sang hymns, ate sandwiches, and stood in line outside the infamous 525 Sansome Street building as he awaited his turn. Thankfully he wasn’t detained. More recently, he had another appointment without much event, as he awaits a final court date before an immigration judge.

Strangers in our midst, sparks of the Divine, reminders of the Holy One. If you’ve been with me, invariably you’ll be in a selfie photo, which I will later share on social media. I do so, I say, because every encounter is a sacred encounter that will not be repeated exactly the same way. Each encounter is an opportunity for good, to bear witness to the goodness of God, to do good, to show mercy, to receive mercy, to be a child of God with a fellow child of God.

And yes, this leads to Jesus. It has to. John 1:10ff says: “yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” Unbeknownst to the world, the Holy One born among us, the Divine One who broke bread, the Son of God who was crucified, the Son of Man who was resurrected...that One, that Stranger among the Estranged, turns out to be the Savior and Lord of the world.

Theoxenia.

In Joy & Justice,

Neal

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

*#CalledToCommunity
#CommittedToJustice*

EP's Upcoming Travels & Preaching/Speaking

July 26: Preaching at Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church (10:00am)

August 2: Worshipping at Daesung Presbyterian Church-Sunnyvale for 50th founding anniversary (11:00am)

August 9: Preaching at Trinity Presbyterian Church-Santa Cruz (10:30am)

August 10-23: Vacation

August 30: Preaching at Westview Presbyterian Church-Watsonville (10:00am);
Preaching at San Martin Presbyterian Church (1:00pm)

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.

Featured



GA 227 at a Glance: Key Actions & Decisions

The 227th General Assembly addressed a wide range of issues affecting the life, witness, and governance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) during last month's plenary sessions. The attached resource gathers selected articles from The Presbyterian Outlook and the PC(USA) website to highlight key decisions and plenary actions.

[View & Download Resource Here.](#)

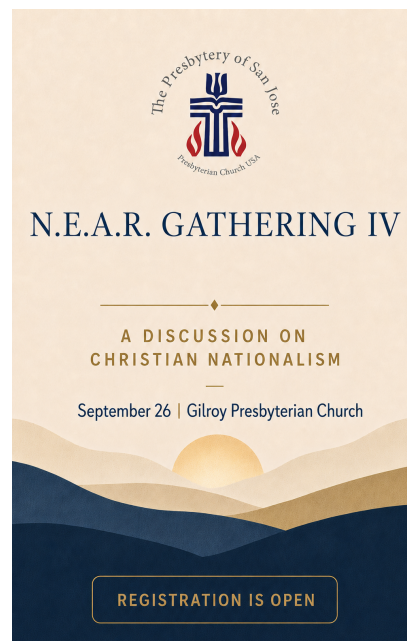
Additionally, the Presbytery will host a **Virtual Town Hall** on August 27, 2026 at 6:00 PM, in which our commissioners and Young Adult Advisory Delegate will share their experiences from the Assembly. The Town hall will be via zoom, with the access link provided below and on the resource document. No registration is required to attend; more details will be shared in the weeks to come.

[Virtual Town Hall - Zoom Link](#)

NEAR Gathering IV **Register Now** **through September 12th**

The Presbytery of San Jose's fourth N.E.A.R. Gathering will take place on Saturday, September 26, 2026 (9:00 am to 1:00 pm) at Gilroy Presbyterian Church. This year's gathering is centered around a pressing and timely theme: Christian Nationalism.

Guest Speakers from Princeton Seminary will deliver keynote addresses and partake in a sit-down discussion with EP Neal Presa. Light Breakfast and lunch provided. This event is made possible by the Synod's Anne Penke fund.



Register Here



Called Special Meeting of the Presbytery **Friday, August 7th at 7:00 PM (via Zoom)**

The Coordinating Council has announced a called special meeting to be held on Friday, August 7, at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. Members will consider several significant items of business, including the validation of a new Presbytery Peacemaking and Justice Minister position and Good Growth Gardens as a worshipping community, the

ordination and installation of Ms. Veronica Ota, and a request from Westview Presbyterian Church regarding the sale of its manse.

Members are encouraged to review the meeting materials in advance.

[View the full docket and call to the meeting here.](#)

[Register for the called special meeting here.](#) The Zoom link will be provided after registration. Related motions and additional meeting information are also available on the Presbytery website under [Meetings.](#)

Questions may be directed to Stated Clerk Grace Kaori Suzuki at gracekaori@sanjosephby.org, Executive Presbyter Neal Presa at neal@sanjosephby.org, or Communications & Executive Support Associate Colin Richardson at colin@sanjosephby.org.

This Week



Board of Pensions to Update 2027 Post-Retirement Medical Coverage

Beginning January 1, 2027, the Board of Pensions will transition its post-retirement medical coverage from Humana to the UnitedHealthcare Group Medicare Advantage PPO Plan, with prescription drug coverage provided through Express Scripts. The new plans will replace the current Humana medical and prescription drug plans, which end December 31, 2026.

There will be no monthly premium for members in 2027, as the Board will fully subsidize the \$284-per-member monthly cost. Members retiring during 2026 may enroll in the Humana plan through the end of the year and will automatically transition to the new coverage unless they opt out during Medicare open enrollment, October 15–December 7, 2026.

For active employees, the 2027 Medical Plan will offer six coverage options: the existing PPO, EPO, and HDHP options—renamed Premier—plus three new Select options with similar features and different out-of-pocket costs. Employers may offer any combination of these options to eligible employees not enrolled through the Congregational Pastors Package or Transitional Pastor’s Participation. Ministers and eligible family members enrolled through those packages will continue to receive PPO coverage, renamed PPO Premier for 2027.

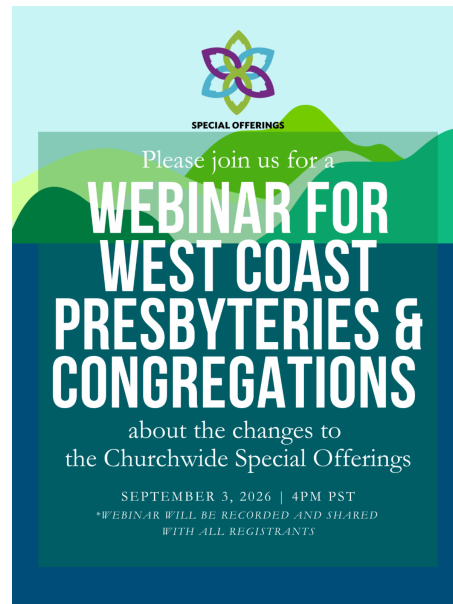
[Learn more about the 2027 Medical Plan options.](#)

[Read the Full Board of Pensions Bulletin Here.](#)

On Thursday, September 3, at 4:00 p.m. PT, PC(USA) Special Offerings staff will host a webinar for West Coast presbyteries and congregations about recent changes to the denomination's churchwide Special Offerings.

Participants will learn about the General Assembly action behind the changes, the causes each offering will support, and a new grant opportunity through the World Communion Offering. The webinar will also include time for questions and feedback.

Registration for the webinar is available below. Those unable to attend live are still encouraged to register, as a recording will be shared with all registrants.



[Register Here](#)

Free Chancel Candles & Lighting Tapers Available through Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church

Pastor Deborah Troester of Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church is giving away an excess of sanctuary supplies those interested. This includes:

- 23 beeswax Chancel candles (14 in. tall)
- 3 boxes of lighting tapers (for acolyte candle-lighters)

Supplies may be picked up at the 4th NEAR Gathering in Gilroy (September 26) or directly from the church office (5730 Snell Ave, San Jose; Tuesday–Thursday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m.) To arrange pickup, contact Deborah Troester at prdebsthpc@gmail.com or call the church office at (408) 629-5906.

In Case You Missed It

📌 Notice for All Congregations & Ministry Partners Updated IRS Mileage Rate

Effective July 1 through December 31, 2026, the IRS optional standard mileage rate for eligible business and ministry-related travel increases from 72.5 cents to 76 cents per mile. Organizations using the IRS rate should update their reimbursement policies, forms and accounting systems accordingly (**this includes NWC's, affiliated nonprofits, and ministry partners**). Travel completed before July 1 remains subject to the earlier rate.

Please note that the rate for mileage driven as a volunteer in service to a charitable organization remains unchanged (14 cents per mile). Read the full announcement for further guidance:



New Grant Opportunities for Ministers & Congregations

Two recently announced grant opportunities are available to support congregations, pastors, and ministry leaders in strengthening their work through technology, study, and faithful reflection. The Presbyterian Foundation is offering Church Technology Grants of up to \$5,000 to help pastoral leaders strengthen their ministry through technology.

[Read More](#)

A Place at the Table ☐○☐

SUMMER SPOTLIGHT

Rev. Ryan Althaus · Hunger Advocate

A New Hub for Hunger Resources

Checkout the newest addition to our Presbytery's advocacy resources! In collaboration with Ryan, the website intends to provide updates information and events related to hunger, mental health, etc. Check out the July offerings at the link below.



[Visit New Page Now](#)

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

Pieces on Peace ☐

SPECIAL EDITION

Veronica Ota · Peacemaking & Justice Advocate

Take Action:
**Help Support Educational Programs
for Incarcerated Neighbors!**

Donate now to support the Transformative Justice Center's (Monterey, CA) "Summer Freedom Match Campaign" for the Empathy in Action program.

Empathy in Action offers the unique opportunity for college students, faculty, and select public to engage in deep dialogue and deep listening with incarcerated populations, following a Transformative Justice curriculum. The program motto is “Engaging literature, and our own stories, to build bridges of empathy, insight, and healing between the incarcerated and the public.”

Incarcerated participants from Empathy in Action have pledged \$5000 of their own funds to match donations given to the Summer Freedom Match. That is how much they believe in this program - that they have saved up and pledged their own money while imprisoned to bring awareness to the Empathy in Action program.

If you'd like to learn more or consider applying to the Empathy in Action program, reach out to Megan at the Transformative Justice Center: mmcdrew@transformativejusticecenter.org or contact our Peacemaking and Justice Advocate: Veronica@sanjosephby.org.

Donate

Unity Candle □

SUNDAY, JULY 26



Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos

Los Gatos

This Sunday, we recognize the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos as they host the unity candle. Notably, we ask that you lift up PCLG's Pastor, the Rev. Dr. David G. Watermulder, Associate Pastor Rev. Erica Rader, Parish Associate Rev. Jack Longley, and the dedicated church staff, elders, deacons and volunteers who help guide the congregation's vast offerings. With roots extending back to the founding of its original congregation in 1881, PCLG continues to serve as a gathering place where people of all ages can grow closer to God and to one another. Throughout its long history, the church has continued to evolve alongside the surrounding community while remaining grounded in its commitment of hospitality and connection through God.

PCLG nurtures faith across generations through ministries for children, youth, and college students, helping young people maintain a strong spiritual foundation as they grow and travel near and far for school. Its wider mission also extends into the community through partnerships such as Martha's Kitchen, which provides thousands of meals and groceries each month, and Immanuel House, the Presbytery's refugee ministry that has welcomed and supported more than 100 refugees since opening in 2015.

As the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos receives the Unity Candle this week, we ask our neighboring congregations to lift its pastors, leaders, members, and ministry partners in prayer. May God continue to strengthen their witness and guide them as they offer a place of belonging, service, and spiritual growth for generations to come.

To learn more about this week's congregation, you can visit their website here:
[PCLG Website](#)

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

Clergy Reminders



Required Training for Clerks of Session August 15th & September 12th

Clerks of Session and other church leaders responsible for minutes are asked to attend one of the two upcoming trainings. Both dates will include the same content (a sessions minute review and clerk-specific training), facilitated by Stated Clerk Grace Kaori Suzuki. Available dates are listed below:

Saturday, August 15 — St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 9:00–11:00am

Saturday, September 12 — Westminster Presbyterian Church, 9:00–11:00am

Please register in advance at the link below. Direct any questions regarding minutes review or clerk responsibilities to Stated Clerk Grace Kaori Suzuki at gracekaori@sanjosepby.org.

REGISTER HERE



**Retired Clergy Gathering & Luncheon
Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos
Wednesday, September 9 at 11:30 a.m**

A friendly invitation to all Retired Teaching Elders and Clergy across the Presbytery of San Jose to save the date for a first-ever lunch fellowship gathering, taking place on Wednesday, September 9, at 11:30am at Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos.

This special gathering will be co-hosted by the Rev. Jack Longley, HR, Parish Associate at Presbyterian Church Los Gatos, and EP Neal Presa, with grant support from the Church Health & Growth Working Group. Retired clergy are warmly invited to gather for a meaningful time of fellowship, connection and conversation.

For those Elders who have already registered (via mail, online, email, etc.), you do not need to complete any other steps. We look forward to gathering together.

Registration is now Available at the link below.
RSVP Deadline Is August 15th.

RSVP NOW!



**Clergy & Church Leaders of Color Retreat
Zephyr Point | October 19th to 22nd**

Registration is now available for this year's Clergy and Church Leaders of Color Retreat, co-facilitated with the Presbyteries San Francisco, Redwoods, and North Central California.

Visit the link below to view event, payment & subsidy information. RSVP deadline is September 30.

REGISTER NOW

Employment Opportunities

The Presbytery and its partners/affiliates are always hiring. Visit our Employment Opportunities page or read about new opportunities below from congregation and Presbytery-affiliated organizations:



First Presbyterian Church of Mountain View

- [Part-Time Female Vocalist](#)

First Congregational Church of San Jose (UCC)

- [Assistant to Interim Minister](#)

First Presbyterian Church of Snohomish (Washington State)

- [Installed Pastor](#)

Urban Sanctuary San Jose

- [Part-Time Lead Pastor](#)

[VIEW ALL POSITIONS](#)

www.sanjosepby.org

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