



Presbytery of San José

October 9, 2026

"Our structures are not artifacts."

— **The Rev. Dr. Christian Boyd**

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

This week's Pastoral Word comes from the Rev. Dr. Christian Boyd, Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Milwaukee and a friend and colleague of our Executive Presbyter, the Rev. Dr. Neal Presa. In it, he invites Sessions to ask whether their Manuals of Administrative Operations still serve the ministry God is calling them to today. I encourage you all to read the piece and reflect on the Reverend's offerings as we prepare to gather for our own called meeting. May we strive to find balance between bettering the processes of polity as well as centering His word in each and every manner we discuss. Blessings to you all in our shared journey forward.

Read the full reflection on our website:

[When the Church Changes, Our Manuals Should Too](#)

Regards,

Colin Richardson

Communications and Executive Support Associate

colin@sanjosepby.org

IN THIS ISSUE

A quick look at this week's news, events, and opportunities.

FEATURED

***Recognizing Rev. Woodsmall for 31
Years of Ministry***

Read the story below

ADVOCACY

Meet the Hands That Feed Us

Date & Time · [Here](#)



PRESBYTER REMINDERS

SURVEY: Did You Attend Saturday's N.E.A.R. event?

We want your Feedback...

[Take Survey Here](#)

RSVP for Fall Clergy Retreat: "Pits & Wells"

Oct 28 & 29 · San Juan Bautista ·

[Register Here](#)



UNITY CANDLE

Westview Pres. Church & Good Growth Garden – Watsonville

Sunday, October 11 · Rev. Dan Hoffman & Rev. Veronica Toyomi Ota



MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT

RSVP Now • Commissioning of Rev. Veronica Toyomi Ota

Oct 31 · 10:00am · All are invited · [Register & View Info Here](#)



EP ON THE ROAD

Mid-Council Leaders Gathering

Oct. 11-14 · Louisville, KY



RESOURCES

NEAR V Location Announced • New Fall Webinar Dates

EP's Upcoming Travels & Preaching/Speaking

October 11-14: Mid-Council Leaders Gathering at Presbyterian Center; Louisville, KY

October 14-16: Auburn Theological Seminary board of directors at New York City

October 19-22: Co-facilitating Annual Leaders of Color Retreat; Zephyr Point Conference Center, NV

October 28-29: attending Presbytery Clergy Retreat at St Francis Conference Center, San Juan Bautista

October 31: Attending the Commissioning of the Rev. Veronica Toyomi Ota at Westview Presbyterian Church (10:00 am)

November 15-25: World Council of Churches Executive Committee, Manila, Philippines

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

Meetings & Gatherings Schedule for 2027

NEAR V Location Announced • New Dates Added

PRESBYTERY BUSINESS MEETINGS

Sat., Feb. 27 • 9 a.m.–1 p.m. — In person, with option to attend virtually • Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church

Thu., April 22 • 5–6:30 p.m. — Zoom • *Book of Order* amendments only

Sat., Oct. 30 • 9–11 a.m. — Zoom

COORDINATING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Thu., Feb. 4 • 5–7 p.m. — Zoom

Thu., April 22 • 6:30–7:30 p.m.* — Zoom

Thu., Oct. 7 • 5–6:30 p.m. — Zoom

NEAR GATHERINGS

Sat., May 1 • 9 a.m.–1 p.m. — NEAR Gathering V: *Artificial Intelligence and Faith*

• In person • Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos

Sat., Sept. 25 • 9 a.m.–1 p.m. — NEAR Gathering VI • In person, location TBD •

Tentative guest: Co-Moderator(s) of the 227th General Assembly

TOWN HALLS

Wed., Jan. 27 • 5–6 p.m. — Topic: Presbytery Office (890 Meridian property, staff turnover, payroll provider) • Zoom

Sat., Feb. 27 • 1:30–2:30 p.m.* — Topic: Salty Sheep (boat) • In person, with option to attend virtually • Santa Teresa Hills Presbyterian Church

March 2027 • Dates TBD — Informational Webinar • Topic: *Book of Order* Amendments (in preparation for April 22 Presbytery meeting) • Zoom

Sat., May 1 • 1:30–3 p.m.* — Topic: Watsonville Public House • In person, Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos (option to attend virtually may be offered)

STILL TO COME • FALL 2026

***Fri., Oct. 23 • 6:30–8:00 p.m.** — Informational Webinar • Topic: Proposed 2027 budget & Proposed Ethical Conduct Policy • Zoom

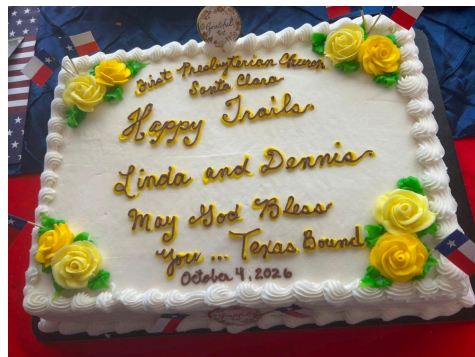
***Thurs., Oct. 29 • 5:00p.m.** — Informational Webinar • Topic: Proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) - Covenant Relationship between First Pres. Mountain View, Menlo Church-Mountain View, and the Presbytery.

Thu., Nov. 5 • 5–6:30 p.m. — Presbytery Business Meeting • Zoom

The full schedule and related documents can be viewed on our website at the link below:

[2027 Presbytery Meeting Schedule & Resources](#)

Questions? Contact EP Neal Presa at neal@sanjosephy.org.





PRESBYTER SPOTLIGHT

Celebrating 31 Years of Ministry

Rev. Dennis Woodsmall Retires • Recognition of Commitment to Our Presbytery

After 31 years of faithful ministry, Pastor Dennis G. Woodsmall has retired from First Presbyterian Church of Santa Clara. A beloved pastor and a familiar presence across our presbytery, Dennis leaves behind a rich legacy of community, friendship and care for others.

On October 4, EP Neal Presa joined the First Presbyterian family to celebrate Dennis's ministry as he and his wife, Linda, begin their retirement. His congregation thanked Dennis for teaching them what it means to be "in relationship with one another and with God." Additionally, they extended gratitude for reminding them that God wants each of us to be made free, whole and in intimate relationship with Him.

Dennis's decades-long ministry has also reached well beyond the church walls. In 1998, he was one of six founding chaplains of the Santa Clara Police Department's Chaplaincy Program. He recently retired after 28 years of service there, supporting officers, staff, families and the community through critical incidents, ceremonies and everything in between, often at a moment's notice.

Dennis led his final worship service at First Presbyterian this past Sunday, Oct. 4, to a packed house. He shared some brief words of thanks to family, friends and colleagues for making the day so special: "The music was great. The words were wonderful, much more than I deserve, and the lunch was filled with old connections and sad goodbyes. It's amazing to think after 31 years that I would walk out of that place and be moving to Texas."

As Dennis and Linda soon begin their next chapter in New Braunfels TX, we give thanks for his years of ministry among us. We wish them a blessed and fulfilling future as they enter this next chapter.

This Week



Fall Clergy Retreat • "Pits & Wells"

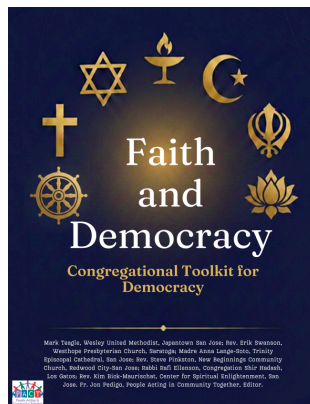
Wed, Oct. 28 & Thurs, Oct.29

St. Francis Retreat Center • San Juan Bautista

Pastors and ministers of our Presbytery are invited once again to step away for rest and renewal at this year's Clergy Retreat, October 28–29, 2026, at St. Francis Retreat Center in San Juan Bautista. This year's gathering, themed "Pits and Wells," will be guided by spiritual director Rev. Fred Harrell, who serves as transitional pastor of Stone Church – Willow Glen. Additionally, the time will allow for fellowship and peaceful study in a picturesque setting.

Overnight registration (\$100) includes dinner on October 28 and breakfast and lunch on October 29; commuter registration (\$50) is also available for those joining for the day. Register now the form here: forms.gle/7C8kKeWsUVQ9QhiG6

Checks should be made payable to the Presbytery of San José and mailed to the Presbytery office. For questions or inquiries, contact EP Neal Presa at neal@sanjosepby.org



Midterm Voting Resources

Faith & Democracy Toolkit • P.A.C.T. Info Meeting

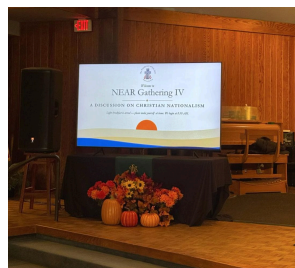
The Rev. Erik Swanson, the social justice committee at Westhope Presbyterian Church in Saratoga, and their interfaith partners have authored "Faith and Democracy: Congregational Toolkit for Democracy." The toolkit has four self-standing modules that walk a group through how our democracy works, the challenges facing it, what it means to be an informed voter, and practical next steps a congregation can take together. With the midterms approaching, it is a ready-made tool for sessions, adult education classes, and small groups looking to stay informed and engaged.

View and download the resource at the link here:

[Faith & Democracy Congregational Toolkit](#)

Building on this work, PACT is inviting church leaders to join us on Thursday October 1st for an orientation to the Voting is Sacred campaign as we prepare for the midterm elections. With anxiety running high about the elections we are trying to prepare congregations for what some of the issues are, what they can do, and how they can organize. This is on line only.

If you have questions please call Rev. Erik Swanson at 408-916-8808. The zoom link is included. The zoom link for October 1st meeting can be found below:



NURTURE • EDUCATE • ADVOCATE • RESOURCE

What We Heard at the 4th N.E.A.R. Gathering

*Keynotes by Drs. Carter and Reichel • offering for CAB and
Amigos de Guadalupe*

This past Sunday, folks from across the presbytery gathered at Gilroy Presbyterian Church bright and early for our fourth NEAR Gathering, ushering in the day's conversations with worship from Gilroy's very own Rev. Trevor Van Laar. The day's theme of Christian nationalism proved to evoke diverse perspectives that carried through the 277th General Assembly.

Dr. Heath Carter grounded us in history, tracing how faith and national identity have been bound together in American life, and who has paid the price. His reminder: behaviors that shun and exclude only make the vulnerable more vulnerable. Dr. Hanna Reichel, also of Princeton Theological Seminary, turned to the practical question of how the church responds. Among her many resonant points, Dr. Reichel argued that when we label those around us as fascists, we may be feeding the very threat we want to resist. Together, they named the problem honestly and grounded it in the context of our ministry of God's message.

The conversation didn't stay at the podium. In breakout groups and a town hall-style conversation with our Executive Presbyter, our own ministers and elders spoke to how these issues are playing out in their congregations and worshiping communities.

The day also put that conversation into practice. Rev. Veronica Ota, our newly ordained Peacemaking and Justice Minister, alongside the Mission and Outreach Working Group (MAOWG), dedicated the offering to the Community Action Board (CAB) and Amigos de Guadalupe. Both mission partners, the two organizations have been actively protecting and accompanying our immigrant neighbors across the South Bay and beyond. (MAOWG still has grant funds available; learn more on our website under "Forms.")

That afternoon, a group of attendees carried the day's witness just minutes away from the church to the latest proposed ICE detention site. There, Rev. Ota led a prayer vigil for those detained, separated from family, living in fear, or lost in detention.

NEAR began in 2025 with support from the Anne Penke Fund of the Synod of the Pacific and your per capita and mission giving. Thank you to Gilroy Presbyterian Church for hosting, to our speakers, and to everyone who came.

SURVEY:

Attended? Help Shape Future Gatherings

We'd love to hear from you. Our short feedback survey takes about three minutes, and your answers will help shape the topics and format of future gatherings:

TAKE SURVEY HERE

This Week

HUNGER ADVOCACY • REV RYAN ALTHAUS

Santa Cruz County
Open Farm Tours
Oct. 10-11

Tour multiple local family farms
that practice sustainable agriculture

Food, U-Picks, produce, flowers,
apple pressing, kids activities,
food preservation demos & more!

Oct. 10 - South County Farm Tours
Oct. 11 - North County Farm Tours

Friends & Family Weekend Pass
\$25 per carload of up to 5 people!

**Click Here to Purchase
Tickets**

Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food!
openfarmtours.com

Meet the Hands that Feed Us

Open Farm Tours in Santa Cruz • Oct. 10 & 11

Get to know the farmers who feed our communities at this year's Open Farm Tours! On Saturday, Oct. 10, visit South County farms including Live Earth Farm, Esperanza Community Farms, and Blossom's Biodynamic Farm; on Sunday, Oct. 11, head north to Swanton Berry Farm, Homeless Garden Project, and more. All participating farms are organic and committed to sustainable practices, and each offers a chance to learn how a healthy regional food system can nourish both people and land.

Tour at your own pace between 10am and 4pm. A Friends & Family Pass covers up to five people per carload for both days for just \$25. Learn more and get tickets here:

www.openfarmtours.com/

For questions, contact info@openfarmtours.com, or reach Ryan directly at ryan@sanjosephby.org.

Pieces on Peace ☮

PEACE & JUSTICE MINISTER • REV VERONICA OTA

This month I officially stepped into my role as our presbytery's Minister of Peacemaking and Justice. I first want to thank all those who have shared kind words of congratulations and prayers throughout my first year of working with Presbytery of San José. It has been a true blessing to receive such support and encouragement.

Since this is a new position and some have asked questions, I'll share a little background about how this position came to be and what hopes I have for my ministry endeavors. In January of 2026, I joined the presbytery as Peacemaking and Justice Advocate, working to educate, equip, and empower our presbytery, churches, and members to engage in justice work they felt their faith called them to engage in. There is no doubt that this advocacy work was certainly a form of ministry on its own, as all Christians are called to understand our vocations in terms of serving and loving God and neighbor...

CONTINUE READING

For questions or resources, contact Veronica at veronica@sanjosephby.org.

Unity Candle ☐

SUNDAY, OCT. 11





Westview Presbyterian Church

WATSONVILLE

This Sunday, we recognize Westview Presbyterian Church in Watsonville as it hosts the Unity Candle. We ask that you lift up Westview's pastor, the Rev. Dan Hoffman, who has passionately served the congregation for over 16 years. Additionally, we recognize Rev. Veronica Ota, who will soon be commissioned to lead Westview's neighboring garden ministry.

Westview is a historic Japanese American congregation whose story reaches back to 1898, when a small mission opened on Main Street in Watsonville. Recognized by the presbytery in 1903 and organized as a church in 1909, the congregation continued to worship together through incarceration at Poston, Arizona during World War II, and afterward opened its doors as a hostel for families returning home. Today, its church site is a historical landmark and a testament to more than a century of faith and perseverance.

That same spirit of welcome shapes Westview's ministry today. The church hosts HOPE Village, which opened this past May as a transitional housing community offering wrap-around services for unhoused neighbors in the Pajaro Valley. Westview has also welcomed Good Growth Gardens, a new worshipping community led by the Rev. Veronica Ota. The garden will hold its inaugural "Garden Work Day" on Nov. 14, in hopes to welcome community members and introduce members of the neighboring Hope Village to join in group gardening and fostered fellowship.

Weekly offerings from the church include their "Midweek Recharge", a time of scripture reflection, prayer, and mutual support, on Wednesdays at 4 pm via Zoom. Check it out along with the many volunteering and immersion-based opportunities provided through the ministry.

As Westview Presbyterian Church receives the Unity Candle this week, we ask our neighboring congregations to hold Pastor Dan in prayer. May God continue to guide Westview as a community of faith, resilience, and hospitality, sharing Christ's love throughout Watsonville and the greater Pajaro Valley.

For more information about this week's congregation(s), visit the links below:
www.westviewpc.org/

To follow the path of our Unity Candle, visit the link below:
tinyurl.com/SJUnity2025

Save the Date



Join Us in Commissioning
Rev. Veronica Toyomi Ota
Peacemaking and Justice Minister

Sat., Oct. 31 • 10 a.m. • Westview Pres. Church

Please join friends, family, and members of the Presbytery of San José as we celebrate the commissioning of Rev. Veronica Toyomi Ota as Peacemaking and Justice Minister. This call affirms the ministry of peace and justice she has already been living out among us. Veronica will also serve as the ordained pastor of Good Growth Gardens, Watsonville's new worshiping community. It is an inclusive, intergenerational space that nurtures faith and community alongside food and nature. Come share in this joyful day of worship, and stay for the reception that follows. We ask that you RSVP by Friday, Oct. 16. More info can be found below.

RSVP HERE

LEADING CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION
CONTINUING EDUCATION INSTITUTE

Now, more than ever, our communities need faithful expressions of justice, liberation, and love. But how do we know if our well-meaning actions and offerings are **making a difference**? If what we are doing matters in our lives and in the world, we must develop meaningful ways to measure effectiveness, in order to lead change and transformation.

The week will give you **practical tools** to unpack the needs of your community, honestly assess your resources, and imagine ways ministries and programs can be **more effective** for those we serve. The retreat is designed for all church leaders – pastors, educators, elders, lay leaders, and church professionals.

Dates
October 25–30, 2026

Location
Zephyr Point Conference Center

REGISTER

Measuring What Matters

Leading Change and Transformation Retreat • Oct. 25–30

Discover new ways to tell whether your ministry is making a difference at this year's Leading Change and Transformation retreat! Budgets, membership and attendance no longer capture the full picture of faithful ministry. This weeklong retreat at Zephyr Point Conference Center (NV) offers practical tools to understand your community's needs, honestly assess your resources, and imagine ways your ministries can serve others more effectively.

The retreat is open to all church leaders! Register and learn more at the link below:

zephyrpoint.org/adult-programs/continuing-education-institute/

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 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

Presbytery of San Jose | 890 Meridian Way | San Jose, CA 95126 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email & social marketing for free!