



Presbytery of San José

September 25, 2026

The Abiding and Abounding Presence of God

Dear Members and Friends of the Presbytery of San José,

Grace and peace in the name of the Savior, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and in the fellowship and unity of the Holy Spirit.

There contained in that salutation is a Trinitarian invitation and reminder that our God's presence, power, promise, and personhood abides with us in every way. One of my favorite prayers in the *Book of Common Worship-Daily Prayer* is one written by St. Patrick of Ireland (389-461 CE):

May the strength of God pilot us.
May the power of God preserve us.
May the wisdom of God instruct us.
May the hand of God protect us.
May the way of God direct us.
May the shield of God defend us.
May the host of God guard us against
the snares of evil and the temptations of the world.

May Christ be with us,
Christ before us,
Christ in us,
Christ over us.
May your salvation, O Lord,
be always ours this day and forevermore.

What St. Patrick invokes is the full presence of God and our full recognition of the Divine presence in our lives, in every place, always. This is reminiscent of the apostle Paul's paraenesis:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

-Romans 8:38-39 (NRSV)

Tomorrow morning (9:00am-1:00pm; breakfast 8:00am), the Presbytery will gather at Gilroy Presbyterian Church for NEAR Gathering IV. Our focus will be on Christian Nationalism, and we have invited Professors Heath Carter and Hanna Reichel of Princeton Seminary, to frame historically and theologically what we are experiencing of the weaponization of faith in our politics. We will do so in community through Morning Prayer, small group discussions and reflections, keynote presentations, a townhall conversation with Q&A, and, of course, over meal. Then at 1:30pm, you are

invited to gather at the parking lot of Gilroy Pres as we'll carpool to a proposed ICE detention site in Gilroy. We will have a prayer vigil, joining our hearts and voices to the collective witness of God's compassion and justice. The prayer vigil is at 2:00pm.

All of this is to say that in our Christian faith and in life's journey, we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28) in the presence of the Triune God, and in community of faith – of those who are living, and those who are alive in Christ in the eternal realm of the Ancestors. Every generation struggles for God's justice in the world. And in every generation, people of faith are confronted with the false promises and bankrupt premises of powers and principalities which seek to contradict and contravene the gracious love of God for all people. Because the work and witness of God is against powers and principalities, we live and move in the abiding and abounding presence of the Lord. We need the abiding and abounding presence of the Lord. And we need to remind and encourage one another of the abiding and abounding presence of God every day. Life gets overwhelming. Personal and communal losses eclipse rays of joy. Physical, spiritual, relational, and emotional hardship are devastating to the heart-mind-body. That is why we need to be in community, and to connect with the gifts of community: gathering, praying, learning, nurturing, eating, protesting, worshipping, serving, confessing, encouraging. That is why we read Scripture together and learn from others what the Spirit has revealed in their hearts. That is why we read and say prayers like that of St. Patrick. That is why we engage with past and present liturgies. That is why we find places to gather over a meal, for coffee, to be with one another. After all, as my wife reminded me once, we are human *be*-ings, not human *do*-ings!

In all things, in every way, all the way, always – the abiding and abounding presence of God is with you, is with me, is with us. To that, we individually and collectively say, Amen!

In Joy & Justice,

Neal D. Presa
Executive Presbyter

#CalledToCommunity
#CommittedToJustice

IN THIS ISSUE

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

FEATURED

NEAR Gathering IV:

TOMORROW!

Gilroy Presbyterian Church · 9:00am–1:00pm

— Keynote Speakers & Discussion on
Christian Nationalism

ADVOCACY

ICE OUT Prayer Vigil

Sept 26 · 2:00–3:00pm · Following NEAR
Gathering, at the proposed ICE detention site
in Gilroy. Carpool leaves at 1:30pm. (See
Pieces on Peace)



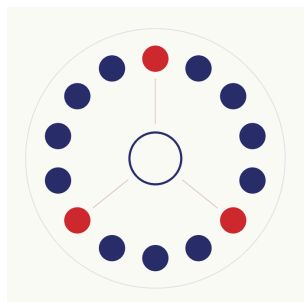
PRESBYTER REMINDERS

PRESBYTER SURVEY:

Gathering Format for 2027

Due Monday, Sep 28 · Your Input shapes next year's meeting schedule

[Take Survey Here](#)



UNITY CANDLE

Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church

Sunday, Sep 27 · Rev. Edd Breeden



MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT

Leaders of Color '26 Retreat:

October 19-22 · Zephyr Point Conference Center · Theme: "Building Resilience Through Spiritual Practice"

[Register Now](#)

Fall Clergy Retreat Announced: "Pits & Wells"

Oct 28-29 · San Juan Bautista ·

[Register Here](#)

EP ON THE ROAD

Preaching at First Pres. Church of Mountain View

Oct. 4 · Then Attending the retirement fo Rev. Dennis Woodsmall at First. Pres Church of Santa Clara



EP's Upcoming Travels & Preaching/Speaking

September 26: NEAR Gathering IV - Gilroy Presbyterian Church (9:00am-1:00pm)

October 4: Preaching at First Presbyterian Church-Mountain View (10:00am); Attending retirement of The Rev Dennis Woodsmall at First Presbyterian Church-Santa Clara (12:00pm)

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

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.

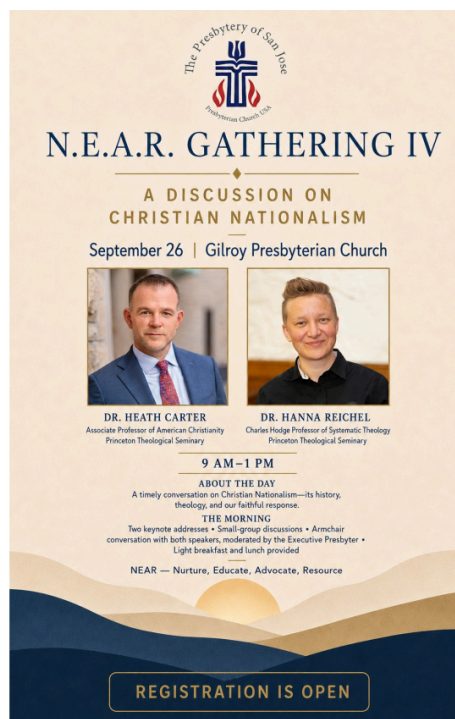
Featured

PRESBYTER SURVEY: We Want Your Input! ***Help Shape Our Gathering Format for 2027***

For the past two years, our presbytery has gathered under an alternative format: a mix of Zoom and in-person business meetings alongside our in-person *NEAR* (Nurture, Educate, Advocate, Resource) gatherings. As we prepare recommendations for 2027 – and consider whether to keep suspending our current standing rules – the Rev. Bryan Franzen, chair of the Polity & Government Subcommittee, and Stated Clerk the Rev. Dr. Grace Kaori Suzuki have put together a short survey to hear from you. All active members of the presbytery are encouraged to complete the survey below.

There's still time! We ask that you complete it by Monday, September 28, so your responses can inform the Coordinating Council's October 1 meeting. The Council will then settle on the right mix of in-person and virtual business meetings and announce the 2027 schedule at our Called Meeting on Thursday, November 5. How we gather shapes how we serve one another in the year ahead – thank you for lending your voice.

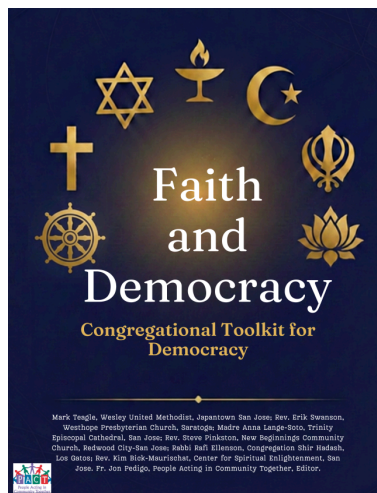
TAKE THE SURVEY → forms.gle/Zntr3uUT6A8aPSuY9



NEAR Gathering IV: *Tomorrow*
Gilroy Presbyterian Church | 9:00am–1:00pm
"A Discussion On Christian Nationalism"

See you Saturday! Join us at Gilroy Presbyterian Church, 6000 Miller Ave., Gilroy, for the presbytery's fourth N.E.A.R. Gathering. Light breakfast begins at 8:00 a.m., and the program runs from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. It features keynotes from Dr. Heath Carter and Dr. Hanna Reichel of Princeton Theological Seminary, followed by a sit-down conversation with EP Neal Presa. Lunch provided. This event is made possible by the Synod's Anne Penke fund.

Prayer Vigil to follow: we'll meet in the church parking lot at 1:30 p.m. to carpool to the proposed Gilroy ICE processing center for a brief vigil from 2:00 to 2:30 p.m. Questions? Email Veronica@sanjosepby.org.



NEW RESOURCE:
Faith & Democracy Congregational Toolkit

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." Built as four self-standing modules, it walks 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](#)

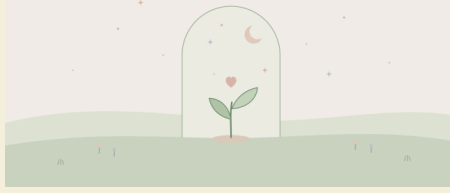


CELEBRATING THE REV. VERONICA TOYOMI OTA **Ordained to the Ministry of Peacemaking and Justice**

On Saturday, September 19, Veronica Toyomi Ota was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament at her home church in the Presbytery of San Gabriel. EP Neal Presa, the Rev. Dan Hoffman of Westview Presbyterian Church in Watsonville, and members of the Presbytery of San Gabriel ordained her through the ancient practice of Laying on of Hands and Prayer.

Rev. Ota will serve as our presbytery's Peacemaking and Justice Minister beginning October 1, with intent to be commissioned as organizing pastor of Good Growth Gardens, a new worshipping community garden connected to Westview. Please keep her and this new ministry in your prayers. She will be commissioned by our presbytery on Saturday, October 31, at 10:00 a.m. at Westview Presbyterian Church, with a reception to follow.

Learn more about Veronica's ministry and Good Growth Gardens at the link here:
goodgrowthgarden.wordpress.com/



***Some Other Good News...
BABY ON THE WAY!***

Our newly ordained Rev. Veronica Toyomi Ota and her husband Grant Smith are excited to share that they are expecting their first child in February 2027! We look forward to supporting them and witnessing their journey during this special time!

Unity Candle □

Sunday, September 27



Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church
Santa Cruz

This week, we invite you to pray for Bonny Doon Presbyterian Church, their pastor, the Rev. Edd Breeden (who also serves our presbytery as Treasurer), and all the ministry leaders who have supported this congregation as they continue to nurture a loving, Christ-centered presence in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Bonny Doon's vision is simple and wholehearted: to be a loving community that shows its dedication to God's teachings through tangible acts of care, loving neighbors not only in word, but in action. Whether helping with fire recovery, hosting their annual craft faire, or offering a warm cup of coffee and conversation at Higher Grounds Coffeehouse, their life together reflects a faith that shows up.

Bonny Doon is marked by generosity, hospitality, and grassroots involvement. Higher Grounds, their donation-only café, is lovingly staffed by local volunteers and serves homemade goods alongside fresh-brewed coffee. The church also serves as a community hub, offering Grey Bears donations and free Wi-Fi to its neighbors. During the week, Higher

Grounds is open Thursdays from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., and Women's Bible Study meets in person Thursdays from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m., offering space for study, encouragement, and spiritual growth.

We invite our presbytery members to pray for Pastor Edd, the session, and the people of Bonny Doon as they continue to embody a faith that is lived out and shared: a place of hospitality and hope for their community, and for every family still on the road home.

For more information about this week's congregation(s), visit the links below:

www.bonnydoonchurch.org/

To follow the path of our Unity Candle, visit the link below:

<http://tinyurl.com/SJUnity2025>

This Week

MISSION & OUTREACH UPDATE: Available Funding for Mission Projects

The Mission and Outreach Working Group (MAOWG) still has grant money available to help fund your mission projects. If your mission committee is interested in applying for a grant, please go to our presbytery's website, click on the "Forms" tab, and fill out the grant application for the Mission and Outreach Working Group.

Grant applications are due no later than December 1. If you have any questions, please contact the MAOWG Chair, Pam Siu, at: thesiufamily@yahoo.com. Your mission work is important to us and we are here to help!

Rev. Ryan Althaus · Hunger Advocate

JOIN US October 2-4
in Yosemite National Park

CABIN CAMPING ADVENTURE
REQUIRED RESERVATION FEE: \$50
SUGGESTED DONATION: \$350 (OR ANYTHING WITHIN YOUR MEANS ❤️)

Urban Works Activities:

- ADA-friendly hikes in Yosemite National Park (10/18)
- Community Connection Games
- Yoga to unwind
- Halloween arts & crafts fun
- Dance & music nights
- Campfire stories under the stars
- Yummy healthy meals

Camp Krem Amenities:

- Campfire circle
- Arts & crafts space
- Barn & time with animals 🐮
- Cozy cabins
- Meadow with ADA swing

Don't miss this!

RSVP TODAY

Transportation services provided thanks to Shared Adventures! Limited seats available, reservation required in RSVP form

SHARED ADVENTURES

***INCLUSIVE CAMPING ADVENTURE
October 2-4 | Yosemite, CA
ADA-Accessible Excursions Through Urban Works***

Urban Works is again partnering with Camp Krem Yosemite in Ahwahnee, CA, for a weekend of cabin camping just outside Yosemite National Park. Expect ADA-friendly hikes in Yosemite Valley, two nights in accessible cabins, healthy meals, campfire evenings, and plenty of good company. No prior hiking or camping experience is needed, and transportation is provided thanks to Shared Adventures.

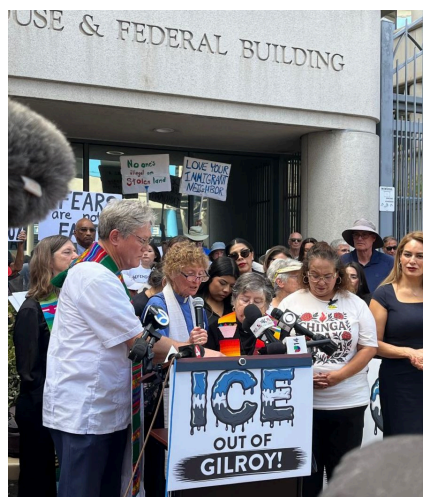
No prior hiking or camping experience is needed, and the Urban Works team is familiar with a wide range of accessibility needs. For registration and pricing information, visit the link here: urbanworks-sc.org

For questions, contact Ryan Althaus at ryan@sanjosepby.org.

Pieces on Peace ☮

SEPTEMBER EDITION

Veronica Ota · Peacemaking & Justice Advocate



Prayer Vigil in Protest of the Gilroy Detention Center Tomorrow | 2:00–2:30pm (following NEAR Gathering)

All are invited to join the Peace and Justice Working Group for a Prayer Vigil this Saturday, September 26, at the site of the proposed Gilroy ICE processing center. We have learned that immigration authorities are now seeking to set up additional temporary detention sites, which could allow them to bypass local zoning and permitting rules. The City of Gilroy has not yet announced its response.

Event Info:

Please meet in the Gilroy Presbyterian Church parking lot (6000 Miller Ave., Gilroy) at 1:30 p.m. to carpool to the site. The vigil will take place from 2:00 to 2:30 p.m. We will pray for those who are detained, for families living in fear of separation, and for wisdom for our city's leaders. Reach out to Veronica@sanjosepby.org for questions, comments, concerns.

Presbyter Reminders

Leaders of Color '26:

Building Resilience Through Spiritual Practice ***Last Change to Register!***

Final call: RSVPs are due next Wednesday, September 30. Registration is open for this year's Leaders of Color Retreat at Zephyr Point Conference Center on Lake Tahoe. Clergy, Commissioned Ruling Elders, and Commissioned Pastors are all included. The annual gathering is co-facilitated with the Presbyteries of San Francisco, Redwoods, and North Central California.

Register at the link here:
forms.gle/cndzSRknXwVEBNKu9

This year's gathering, "Building Resilience Through Spiritual Practice," will be facilitated by The Rev. Dr. Ruth T. West, Associate Dean at San Francisco Theological Seminary and an ordained PC(USA) Minister of Word and Sacrament and Spiritual Director.



Fall Clergy Retreat | Oct. 28–29 ***Theme Announced: "Pits & Wells"*** ***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

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](#)

www.sanjosepby.org

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