

PRESBYTERY OF SANTA BARBARA  
224<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2020) – Questions to be answered by Nominees

Teaching Elder Commissioner Nominee – Rev. Tom Stephen

*The Session at Monte Vista Presbyterian nominated Rev. Tom Stephen to serve as commissioner at the 2020 General Assembly. They, and Tom, also confirm that he will be available to give an update to our Presbytery after the Assembly as well to churches who request further information.*

**1. Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ and its effect on your life.**

Constant Companion.

The One who gives direction and hope.

The Person in whom I find of the forgiveness of my sins and the promise of eternal life.

My Lord - My Savior

The person from history who has had the biggest impact in my life.

I began and remain in ministry because of my relationship with Jesus Christ. While I formally invited Jesus into my life in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, that relationship has gone through many moments and seasons of deepening, distancing, renewing and growing.

As a pastor, husband, father, friend and colleague it is when I am abiding in Christ that I see fruit in my life. At times in my life when I am disconnected with Christ, I find there is very little I can do that has eternal value.

Practically speaking, I speak and listen to Jesus most every day. At times, through His Spirit, He is a small voice that prompts me to go visit someone or to be more intentional to pay attention to the circumstances I am facing. I also find Jesus as I study scripture.

When I am confronted by my own sinfulness and the sinfulness of the world, Jesus is the place and person in which I find and offer forgiveness.

Another place of connecting with Jesus is when I interact with the poor, the lost, the hurting and the lonely. As my mom slowly died of dementia, I remember a day when I saw the Spirit of Christ in her eyes – eyes that no longer knew me and eyes that exuded great love.

I pretty much owe it all to Him. As I experience God through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I find hope, love, grace, direction and empowerment.

**2. How do the Bible and the Confessions guide and influence your views?**

The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament give me wisdom, direction and a more intimate relationship with God. When I am reading the scriptures, my spirit interacts with the Holy Spirit as I study and reflect. I feel God's presence in the scriptures. As one who preaches regularly, it is the bible that serves as the foundation for each sermon and the place where I determine the shape of the sermon.

That Confessions give me historical perspective on how we live out our faith today. I so appreciate understanding when and where each confession was written to better understand how these documents can impact the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Confessions also impact my understanding of the Reformed Faith – as a high school student I ascribed to so many tenants of the Reformed Faith without really knowing that The Confessions existed. As I studied more in seminary, I discovered this faith in the Confessions which affirmed so much of what I already discovered in scripture.

### **3. What do you believe the role of the church is in today's world, and how have you been involved?**

The primary role of the church is to give testimony, to let others know, that God deeply loves them and has revealed Himself through Creation, through Jesus Christ and through the constant presence of the Holy Spirit.

As we experience that love, we are empowered to more fully love others in ways that show people how to live an abundant life. The abundant life includes doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God. We call ourselves and others to live out a relationship to Christ in ways that encounter the deep needs of the world. We also experience the huge blessings that are possible for those who live with God and follow God's best plan for our lives in Christ.

At Monte Vista, we are committed to seeking how to live lives of prayerfulness, compassion, humility with an overt enthusiasm for the gospel of Jesus – we do that by inviting everyone into inspired worship, devoted study, loving fellowship and a faith that serves.

In terms of today's world specifically, I believe the church has a unique role to help people move beyond division. The Body of Christ can be a place where people of very diverse views gather together under Christ not simply tolerating each other but loving each other. While the world might call out differences to divide us (calling us to choose sides), in Christ our differences offer us the ability to have a more complete picture on what humanity looks like and in so doing we get a better picture of the image of God.

We have been given the gifts of repentance and forgiveness which can serve as a model for parts of today's world who have not experienced the saving faith of Jesus' death and resurrection. As the church repents of our places of sin, our areas of brokenness and experiences forgiveness and new life, we offer others the gift of repentance and forgiveness so that both individuals and institutions can find new life and hope.

**Short Biography:** I have served as pastor of Monte Vista Presbyterian Church since 2004. I grew up in Southern California and received a Bachelor of Arts in Music from University of Redlands. Graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1990, where I met my wife Ginny. Ordained ministry began at Timonium United Methodist Church near Baltimore and then we moved to Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Ventura. Together, Ginny and I, published our first book, *Fearless: 40 Reflections on Fear*, in 2006. We have also written curriculum for Focus on the Family, Soul Survivor, Gospel Light Vacation Bible School and have edited books for a variety of writers. I love to surf, read, hang out and enjoy time with family. We have four children, Faith, Hope, Samuel and Daniel.

Young Adult Advisory Delegate (YAAD) Nominee – Casey Crouch  
Member of Pismo Beach Community Presbyterian Church

My name is Casey Crouch, and I am a member of the Community Presbyterian Church of Pismo Beach. I was nominated by the Session and am now submitting my name for your consideration to be the Presbytery of Santa Barbara's Young Adult Advisory Delegate to the 224th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in Baltimore, Maryland. I am also an undergraduate honors student at UCLA studying political science, an associate member of Westwood Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of the Pacific, and a student supervisor at the Charles E. Young Research Library.

1. Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ and its effect on your life.

Jesus is my guide, my teacher, and my God. When I am lost, I seek guidance from his Biblical example and through my prayers. When I am lonely, I think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing he understands how it is to be alone. And when I am joyful, I am reminded of God's grace, thankful for all that God has given me. Truly, the presence of God in Christ is a gift which has guided me all my life, and I am eternally blessed to have been raised to seek his comfort and to follow his teachings.

2. How do the Bible and the Confessions guide and influence your views?

The values which proceed from the Bible have shaped how I have viewed the world ever since I was a small child. The Bible is my fundamental source of morals, and I believe it to be one of God's greatest gifts. In addition to the Bible, I view the Confessions as a way to personally understand how we as Presbyterians are connected to the universal church while having also developed our own unique strand of Reformed theology. I believe the notion that the church is *reformed, always reforming according to the Word of God* has significant implications for how Presbyterians ought to act in the political and social spheres. We should not be satisfied with the status quo whenever Christ's justice is not being done for all.

3. What do you believe the role of the church is in today's world, and how have you been involved?

I believe that the church is called to fulfill many roles in today's complex world. As always, the church is called to be the body of Christ's love, reaching out with moral compassion to all and physical aid to the afflicted. Furthermore, I believe the church is also called to discern Christ's will for humankind and to make it known. This means engaging with the political process and believing in the power of democracy to see one of God's highest causes, that of justice, to be done in the world. To the former, I have served as the child of a pastor and genuinely attempted to follow Christ's teachings, and to the latter, I have worked in political movements, both local and national, and followed my passion for social justice in my studies.

Furthermore, I confirm that I will be available to report to the Presbytery meeting following the General Assembly, and I will keep in contact with churches and Presbytery committees in the future.