



Efrain Rivera '78
Alumni of the Year
October 6, 2017

Efrain Rivera is “the definition of unassuming,” according to fellow 1978 graduate and friend Mark Cerbone. He has a quiet yet powerful presence upon first introduction, but once one makes Efrain’s acquaintance, he or she sees a man of great intellect, impressive musical talent, and a subtle, dry sense of humor that can be “revealed through body-shaking laughter.” While at Houghton, Efrain also brought what Cerbone calls “Jersey aggression” to the intramural football and basketball teams.

As a student, Efrain helped form an expressive weekly worship and fellowship gathering on campus named the “Body Life” service. He led worship on his acoustic guitar while also exploring new depths of prayer and discernment. Valerie (Rudd) Schermerhorn, a fellow 1978 graduate and close friend, recalls his “deep but quiet spiritual stirrings,” as evident back then as they are now.

Efrain’s commitment to serve others is apparent in his consideration of those around him, recognizing and cultivating their gifts and identities in Christ. Valerie remembers meeting Efrain for lunch while he was visiting New York City. A painful situation was causing deep distress for Valerie and her family, and she had received some sharp condemnation and judgment from others. Efrain simply took his friend to lunch, where they discussed the weather, the city itself, and many other topics – but not once did he judge her situation. It was a simple act of kindness that had a profound effect on her.

In 2009 Efrain felt prompted to leave his 21-year career in senior management at Bausch & Lomb to serve Houghton College as its vice president of finance and administration for two years. He brought to the position a deep repository of financial wisdom, a sharp analytical mind, and a keen wit for which he was already renowned. Houghton College President Shirley A. Mullen remarks that “Efrain Rivera embodies the ideals of a Christian liberal arts graduate in general – broadly educated, committed to lifelong learning, full of wonder of curiosity, ... and [engaged in] competent and compassionate service to others.”

Since the conclusion of his work at Houghton, Efrain has served as senior vice president, chief financial officer, and treasurer for Paychex, one of the country’s foremost payroll processing and financial services companies. Paychex has grown in size and scope with Efrain at the financial helm, with 12,000 employees currently serving more than 600,000 clients nationwide. The company is recognized as a Top 100 U.S. Firm and has been honored as one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies.

An avid lifelong learner, Efrain has earned a Master of Business Administration degree, a Doctor of Management degree, and a law degree since graduating from Houghton.

Efrain, you've proven time and again that you are a man who values integrity, honesty, and faith. Your success is measured not only by a long and admirable career, but also by the hundreds – if not thousands – of lives that you've impacted. You stand here today as an example of a Houghton scholar-servant, and for that we are delighted to honor you with the 2017 Alumnus of the Year award.