To Whom It May Concern:

I write to add my voice to the chorus of those who are nominating Cal Hultman for the “DSM/Des Moines Business Record Sages Over 70” award.

As the majority leader of the Iowa Senate, and then as an honest lobbyist fighting for good causes, I know Cal has been a major contributor to our society. But I want to share some of the “rest of the story” regarding Cal … more of a behind the scenes look at his character and influence in his day-to-day life, away from vocation and politics …

No one has had a bigger influence on the development of Lutheran Church of Hope than Cal Hultman. I met Cal in 1993 when I was going door-to-door to invite people who didn’t have a church home to come to this new mission church called Hope. Cal was kind and helpful, and in his down-to-earth, wise, friendly and folksy sort of way, he told me he might show up some Sunday.

A few months later, he did. Back then, we were a church of 50 people or so on a good Sunday, and held services at the Living History Farms Chapel. But this particular Sunday, when Cal first showed up, we met in the barn at Living History farms … because another group had reserved the Chapel. It was cold. It was rainy. The barn was dark. When I saw Cal walking up the dirt path toward the barn, I immediately recognized him, and thought to myself he couldn’t have picked a worse Sunday to attend for the first time. But it was perfect, because Cal has a lot of cowboy in him (from his boyhood days working summers near Yellowstone Park). He is a man who loves simple things, because he has a knack for finding that which is beautiful and holy and hopeful in those things … and in us. From that day until now, for twenty-one years, if he is in town, Cal hasn’t missed a Sunday at Hope.

But here’s my favorite part of this particular story … when Cal finally did come to Hope for the first time, at least ten of our fifty regular attenders were looking for him. You see, Cal had found a way to get ten people to start going to a new church (right around 20% of our total attendance) before he showed up himself! Who else could do that? Only Cal.

After that, Cal and I spent a lot of time together, and I consider it one of the great blessings of my life that our paths have crossed. He is a mentor, a friend and very much a father figure to me.

Cal served as our first congregational president at Hope, took part in every major building campaign, and drove with me to Chicago to single-handedly convince our denominational leaders to give us a loan for the land where our church building now stands (after they, and every bank in town, said “no” for good and practical reasons). I wasn’t even sure it was a good idea, and I told our Church Council. And that's when Cal looked me in the eyes and asked:“Where’s your faith?” Good question! From that moment forward, I was on board. But while I get too much credit for the way Hope has developed and grown into one of the largest churches in that nation, the truth is God used Cal to lead me. I didn’t lead him. It’s no over-statement to say that without Cal’s wisdom, influence and practical effectiveness, Lutheran Church of Hope wouldn’t be what it is, or where we are, today.

Beyond all of the important leadership endeavors Cal has participated in at Hope over the years, perhaps the most important gift he has provided for the church is creating a culture of truth and hope for the high percentage of folks in our community who struggle with addictive behaviors. Cal has been courageously open and highly effective in leading us to be a church where addicts find real and lasting hope. I would estimate, conservatively, that at least 10% of our church members are in recovery from addictive behaviors … that’s 1500 people who have found new life in Christ through AA, NA. Alanon, Alateen and Celebrate Recovery at Hope, and it just wouldn’t have happened unless God sent Cal Hultman to Hope once upon a time.

Cal doesn’t seek the spotlight. There’s no pretense in him. He’s a simple man, yet almost always the smartest person in the room. He laughs as hard as anyone I’ve ever known, and gets teary-eyed every time God touches his soul. And that happens at least a lot with Cal because he is a man of great faith.

The news that Cal is moving to Texas is a huge loss: for me, for our church, and for Iowa. I’m happy for him, of course, that he can be closer to family and grandkids. It makes sense. But I’d like it better if they all moved back to Iowa sometime … his story, and our stories, are forever bound, and we are better because of him.

If anyone deserves recognition as a “Sage over 70,” it’s Cal Hultman.

Sincerely,

Michael Housholder

Senior Pastor, Lutheran Church of Hope

“40 under 40” Recipient