

Serving Seniors With Christ-Centered Care

Featuring Troy Vugteveen

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TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you for joining us for today's Cornerstone University Wisdom and Influence podcast. Our esteemed guest is the president and chief executive officer of Trillium Living, a nonprofit health organization that enhances the lives of seniors through Christ-centered care. Comprised of nine distinct entities, Trillium Living serves more than seven thousand seniors each day and impacts eighteen thousand eight hundred adults each year.

This incredible reach makes it one of the top senior care providers in the state of Michigan. Established over a hundred and thirty years ago, Trillium Living's divisions have received multiple top national rankings in the U.S. News and World Report. The beautiful mission of Trillium Living is to serve with love and compassion, commit to excellence, and follow Christ's teachings and example in all they do.

Now, in addition to his leadership, our guest today is not just the CEO of Trillium Living, he also is an inaugural member of Cornerstone University's President's Industry Council. Please welcome Troy Vugteveen to the Wisdom and Influence podcast. Troy, thank you for being with us.

Troy Vugteveen: Well, thank you for having me, Dr. Moreno-Riaño.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Woo. Top, top names.

Troy Vugteveen: So...

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yes, it is. Top names. Yes, it is. But Troy, it is great to have you.

Troy Vugteveen: I'm blessed to be here, so.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you for being with us. So I wanna ask you, just tell us about Trillium. It's an incredible organization, and really I got to know it because years ago you wrote me a very, very encouraging note when I first came to Cornerstone in 2021. That's how I got to know you, through that letter and note, and we followed up and we've had breakfast, and now you're part of our council. Thank you. But share with us about Trillium, because it really is an incredible organization.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah. You know, and I remember when you and I first met as well too, and I remember actually sending you that note. And the reason for that, too, was because I knew there's a like-minded mission between Cornerstone and Trillium Living and what we do and the work that you are doing at Cornerstone right now to educate these students, but to educate them not just from a worldly perspective on what's the latest, greatest thing, but it's a biblical perspective that you bring to them. And so we wanna stay close.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you.

Troy Vugteveen: And we knew that because it's a great institution that Cornerstone is, and we just feel blessed to be a part of it.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you, Troy. Yes, you were gracious enough to take my ask to get together, and it was a great time there.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah. And now, yeah, I feel blessed to be on the president's council there. And it's great because there's so many great people on that group that you put together. And so just feel blessed that way. But yes, you were right. Your introduction was spot on about Trillium Living.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And I have to confess, I have wonderful staff who put that together for me, so...

Troy Vugteveen: That kind of went through my mind, but I didn't wanna say that. I can't take credit for it.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So yes, yes, yeah. It's our wonderful team, so. But that just shows your leadership. Give the credit to where it's due.

Troy Vugteveen: So, but yes, Trillium Living, so a lot of people, at least in the West Michigan area, kinda know of Trillium Living as Holland Home. So Holland Home started back in 1892, so it's been around for 134 years. It actually started out of a Reformed Church here in Michigan. And the idea was there was eight widows in that church that they wanted to care for, that they knew needed the care and needed the help. And so that's kinda how it started. And way back then, it's kind of a funny name, but they called them inmates. So they called it Eight Inmates is what they—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Eight Inmates.

Troy Vugteveen: Eight Inmates. So—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: But it was not pejorative. It was—

Troy Vugteveen: No.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Good.

Troy Vugteveen: Absolutely not. So but it's amazing how things have progressed since then.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Troy Vugteveen: Right. Right. And so out of Holland Home were birthed those nine organizations that you talked about. So probably about a year and a half ago, our board of directors said we need to be able to tell our story a little bit better. And to tell our story, not just to tell the story, but to continue to be a light in the community. So that's where Trillium Living was birthed out of, was this idea of how can we tell the story of all these entities that were born out of Holland Home?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Troy Vugteveen: And so through that, we've been able to serve, as you said, 18,000 people each year, about 7,000 a day now. And the majority of those people are people that still live in their homes and are out in the community. And Trillium Living serves all the way from here all the way to the bridge and up north there in Michigan. And so, yeah, it's a great team of people and we have about 1,600 employees. And through that, we have the pleasure of serving a number of different seniors out there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So yeah. It's incredible. Even the number of affiliate organizations that's spun out of it, and you own and manage and... It's an incredible operation. I was absolutely blown away when I dug into it last year, beginning to study it, I realized this is more than just residential living or, I mean, there are a host of things. And maybe you can tell our listeners all, at least a sampling of all the things you do through Trillium.

Troy Vugteveen: Yep. So through Trillium, we manage the care of seniors in a number of different ways. So Holland Home is kinda that's our facility-based service organization. So people that are familiar with Holland Home sometimes think of Raybrook or Brighton, our Brighton campuses or our Raybrook campus. But through that, we have people that actually live on our campuses there, and we serve approximately 1,600 residents through those campuses there. It's at those campuses that you have independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing. And it's all done through our mission. And as you mentioned earlier, the most important piece of that is we're gonna be Christ-focused in what we do. And so when people come to live at Holland Home, they know that's what to expect. They know that that's how things are gonna be run from a Christ-centered perspective, and we will never, never stray from that.

So that's kind of our facility is where we serve people that are on the campuses. Then we also have Atrio Home Care. That's a collaborative organization that Trillium Living owns. And we serve a number of people. We're the largest home care agency in West Michigan, at least. And they do both home care, so medical services for seniors in their home, physical therapy, anything that you would kinda think of as far as getting in a hospital setting or at a rehab center. They're able to do that in people's homes there. So that's Atrio Home Care.

And then Reliance Community Care Partners is another one of our organizations, and they are called a Medicaid waiver program. But basically what they do, the simplicity of it is we keep seniors out of nursing homes, which is kinda funny to say because that's kinda what we do in our facilities. We have nursing homes, but we also wanna keep people in their homes as long as they can possibly be there. So through Reliance, they keep people out of nursing homes, and they also help people transition from a nursing home back to their homes. And then Reliance does a whole bunch of other things, but they do that through contracted services throughout the state of Michigan. So it's a neat organization and it's serving a lot of people that way.

And then we also have Faith Hospice. Many people are familiar with Faith Hospice, and we are the largest hospice provider in West Michigan here. And through that we serve a number of people out in the community, about probably about 300 and close to 350 a day out in the community.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm.

Troy Vugteveen: And then we also have an inpatient hospice, which is called Trillium Woods, and that's in Byron Center here in Michigan. It's a 20-bed inpatient hospice program. And so again, it's a blessing. Those people that serve the patients that come into Faith Hospice, the staff that serve them, are an amazing group of people, and they have a heart for what they do and a heart for serving people and a heart for serving them in a Christ-centered fashion. So it's... Faith Hospice is, yeah, a blessing.

We also have Faith Palliative Care, and so that's our palliative care program. Some people are familiar with palliative care, some may not quite know what that means. Oftentimes people think of palliative care as being connected to hospice, and it's not. So palliative care is for anybody that maybe they're going through a cancer treatment. And so our doctors will help them to be able to live life to the fullest, is what we say, during that treatment. So they set up a regimen to different things for them that help them as they're going through cancer treatments. It could be following a surgery with things that they need, whatever it might be, but their job is to help people to live life to the fullest.

And Dr. John Mulder, he passed away about a year and a half ago. He was the person that ran that program, that started it, but he's kind of a legend in the palliative care industry, I guess you could say. And just a man that had a heart for Christ, but also was there to train doctors in palliative care. So we have a program called Trillium Institute which trains doctors in palliative care. So really the majority of doctors that you might find in the local area here have probably been trained through Trillium Institute when it comes to palliative care. And I mean, we serve some of the local hospitals here with doctors in different areas that way as well too. So great, great organization again, with the palliative care medicine program.

Then we also have Care Resources, which is called a PACE program, and any of your listeners can look up what PACE is. But basically what it does is it helps seniors that may not be able to afford coming into a facility, any facility out there. They're still in their homes, and we have about 32 buses that go out into the community, pick seniors up, and bring 'em to one of our day centers. So we have a day center off of Kalamazoo and 44th Street and one that was just built out in Lowell. And it's through that service there that we go out, we pick up seniors, and we bring 'em back to the day centers, and they'll spend the day there. And they're able to see our doctor, dentist, podiatrist, different people. And again, it's really for people that would never be able to afford being able to get into a facility, but they still need the care as well.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Troy Vugteveen: Yep. And so that's what Care Resources is there for, and we serve about 450 people a day through that program here in West Michigan. And if I were to tour anybody through anything out of all of our programs, Care Resources is the one to see. That's the one, really. It's just an amazing ministry. It's an amazing focus on people that may not have the means to get the care that they need. But they can go there, and I always say that it's a place that's just filled with joy when you walk into that building there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Oh.

Troy Vugteveen: So yeah, so that's a little bit of a flavor of some of the organizations that come under Trillium Living. But I think it gives you a taste of it's there to serve seniors and it's there to be a light in our community and to do what we can to serve our community in the best ways possible.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Troy, thank you. Beautiful. Thank you. And, you know, it reminds me, there's an essay we have assigned to our students in the honors program, and the essay speaks about the important contributions of Christianity in the world. And one of them is hospitals and hospice. And when you go back hundreds of years, there was believers who began this movement. Because the ancient world, old age was not good. I mean, you were seen as an outcast, banished, not cared for. And it was severe and callous the way people were treated, and it was Christians who first called out and said, "We must take care of—" And so you see this movement of medicine and hospitals and nursing and care for the elderly really birthing out of our faith.

And so, talk with us more about the mission piece. So you mentioned the mission of Trillium, because oftentimes in today's conversation, it's easy to think that institutions that do this is a new invention of sorts. But we have a long tradition of men and women faithful to the Lord who love people and are doing this. So talk to us about the mission. You alluded to the inmates. Yes. Right. I immediately thought of James chapter 1, "True religion is this: take care of the widows and the fatherless, and keep yourself unspotted from the world." That's what James says. So talk to us about the mission and just the integration of it and the flourishing of it in the organization.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah. You know, it's... Your brief history lesson there was spot on. You know, and as you were talking about the history of our hospitals and our care and seniors, I was thinking about the educational system as well too, that so many of the colleges and universities were birthed out of churches and Christians that wanted to see that education happen and flourish. And when I think of that history with the hospitals and how seniors were cared for, you know, you alluded to our mission, to serve with love and compassion, commit to excellence, and follow Christ's teachings and example in what we do.

And to me, I love our mission, number one, 'cause it's super simple and I can remember it. So but number two, because of that third bullet point, that we're gonna follow Christ's teachings and example in all that we do. And it's one of the things that we focused on with our leadership as well too. What does that actually mean? And so when you think of the history of the hospital systems and being birthed out of kind of Christians that came together, our mission is right in alignment with the history of what we see there with healthcare. That it starts with Christ, and, you know, you think of who's the great physician, it's Christ. Christ is our great physician, and so that history is right in alignment with where we want people to be focused and what we want people to see. So even when people are getting services through us at Holland Home, bottom line, I want them to see Christ there through our staff, through our people, through our teams, and who they're working with.

And so I think that kinda goes hand in hand with what you were talking about with how so many of these places were birthed out of the Christian atmosphere there. And a lot of them have strayed though too.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. It's a different world. It's a different culture than what it used to be.

Troy Vugteveen: You know, when we think of 100 years ago and what that looked like and how people were being cared for. The regulatory environment is way different than when those first eight inmates were being cared for. You know, it was being cared for by probably the people out of that church that started it, and they did it because it was the right thing to do. And you continue with that same mission because it's the right thing to do. But the regulatory environment...

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And again, the intentions are good most of the time with regulations. They're there to hopefully—

Troy Vugteveen: Regulators will say they're always good.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: They're always good, and they're always gonna find something—

Troy Vugteveen: We're on the other side. Yes, yes, yes. You're being gracious most of the time.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I'm being very gracious.

Troy Vugteveen: I'm being very gracious. So, but at the same time, those regulations are there so you learn to work with them and you learn to work through them, and you learn to challenge as well too, where you feel that it's not quite right or it's not matching up with something.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Troy Vugteveen: But, but yeah, I think too, for us, as far as the Christ-centered piece of it goes, when I listen to you talk, and I've heard you talk with students and others, and you talk about leadership. And, you know, for us at Trillium Living, it's that third bullet point that really drives our focus when it comes to leadership and what does it mean to lead. But that third bullet point, we're gonna follow Christ's teachings and example in all that we do. The past, I would say, year and a half, one of the things we've been doing with our leadership team is looking at that third bullet point and saying, "Okay, what does that mean?" What does it mean that you're gonna follow Christ's teachings and example?

It's great to have it on our wall. We all know it. It's why we're here, but what does it actually mean? And really, when you start to boil it down, it means we're disciples of Christ. And I remember we showed a video, and you may be familiar with Ray Vander Laan. He's a teacher out of Holland Christian out on the lake shore, and he has a video series called RVL Discipleship Series. And it's pretty cool. It's him, he's in his classroom at Holland Christian with the students there. But it's a 10-minute interview with him, and then he has his students there, and then he talks with the students about whatever the topic was. But one of them, the topic was, stay dusty. And so one of our... I gave all of our leadership team a little sandal, and it's a reminder that for us, we're called to stay dusty.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Troy Vugteveen: But what does it mean to stay dusty? And Ray Vander Laan goes, and I wanna steal his story here, which was, back in Christ's time, to be a rabbi was a pretty important position, and people wanted to be able to follow the rabbi. And in this instance, it's following Christ. And in order to do that, that was considered a great privilege. But really, what it meant was you were gonna stay so close to that rabbi that you lived your life like that person. You ate what they ate. You read the materials they were reading. You lived your life the way they were living their life. And bottom line is you stayed so close to them that you're covered in their dust and their path when they're walking. And so it was kind of a theme for us. Last year, it was our theme, which was stay dusty. And just a reminder to us that we're called to stay so close to Christ that we're gonna be covered in his dust.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm.

Troy Vugteveen: So a lot of times people will say, "Well, what's your leadership style?" Or, "What does that look like?" And it sounds kinda weird, but it's, "I want my leadership to be dusty." And now it makes you sound like you're an old person or something, but stay dusty. Stay so close to Christ that you're gonna just emulate him and you have to stay close to the people you're serving.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You do. That does— Yes. I wanna talk with you about that. The part of your mission, it speaks about your commitment to excellence. At times I... When I speak to some of our guests on campus, we have something called Golden Eagle Days, and where we bring rising seniors or seniors who are thinking about college, and the families will come, and I'll discuss the mission and who we are and what we're doing and why we're doing it. And oftentimes I will say to them that one of the key things about Cornerstone that we are pursuing is that Jesus was excellent at all He did. He was not a second-rate redeemer. He was not mediocre. He fulfilled perfectly all that was given to Him to do. And He sets thus a model for us to be excellent at what we do.

So share with us all that you at Trillium do on the excellence part, which I know is far above just meeting the regulatory requirements. You're pursuing a higher goal to honor the Lord and follow Him, but how does that work itself out in the care and the training and the development of your team? Because you guys are doing some cutting-edge stuff in a number of important fields.

Troy Vugteveen: Mm-hmm, yeah. Well, and it's interesting, too, your point about Christ as our example. He's the perfection of what we wanna strive for. And I think that's a great reminder of kinda who we are at Trillium Living, too, is we miss that perfection daily, you know? We don't hit that target like we would like to all the time, because Jesus is God. And there's a perfection that's there, but we strive for it. And we know that if we miss the mark, we're gonna come back and we're gonna say, "How do we do that better? What did we miss? How do we do this?"

You know, we have a saying, so especially in our medical areas and skilled nursing or other areas, if there's something that we've missed there, we do kind of a deep dive into that to be able to look at and see what did we miss here? And oftentimes it's referred to as the Swiss cheese concept. So you think of Swiss cheese with these different holes in it, and if the Swiss cheese all comes together and it all matches and all those holes match up at the same time, that's usually when you have an error or when you have something that's not working. So we're always looking at the Swiss cheese approach to it, is you don't want those holes to all line up at the same time, 'cause that's usually when something passes through.

And so we look at that from the standpoint of what does it mean to commit to excellence? It really means constantly looking at what we're doing. Constantly being reminded that we are not perfect, constantly being humble about who we are, and constantly looking to raise the bar. You had mentioned in your introduction that we've been blessed with a number of different awards or different things, just as Cornerstone has over the years, too. And at the same time, you know when that is out there, it kind of almost makes you a target too for those times that you might miss the mark. But that's the beauty of it, because we're striving for that mission. We're striving for excellence. We're striving to be like Christ. We're striving to commit to what we say we are doing. And so it's a daily endeavor. It's remembering who our maker is and knowing that we are here to humbly serve and to do it as well as we can possibly do it.

So I love the commit to excellence piece because it's what we strive to be. And you know, and I can say too, as we look at that, and we look at that with staff, one of the blessings that we have, if you were to come and visit some of our locations, we have Cornerstone students that are working in our facilities already, you know? And so whether it's they're there to do an internship as a fitness instructor, or they're doing some type of clinical type of internship there, whatever it might be, and there's something special about those students. You can have students from other places that come in, and we do it for a number of different places where they'll come in and they'll do their clinicals there, or they'll do internships there. But when there's a Christ-centered focus, you can feel it. And I think that's one of the privileges we have when we know we have a Cornerstone student that's serving in our facilities is it's a great thing.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And by the way, that was not a paid commercial, everyone.

Troy Vugteveen: That's not a paid commercial.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So just for all of our listeners, this is not scripted.

Troy Vugteveen: No, and you know, we've had a number of people in our IS department, in our IT department that we've hired that have come from Cornerstone as well too. So huge gift to us. I'm just telling you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's great.

Troy Vugteveen: And I'm not—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You're right. It's not scripted. That's great. In fact, I think when we started, I said, "What do you want me to talk about?" Yeah, that's exactly right. So. Right. So, yeah. That's great. Troy, talk with us about the frailty of aging. It's such a — you know, it — we many of us will go through that. I have a father who's 90 years old right now, and as you're sharing with me, I'm thinking about my father, quite frankly. He and I speak almost every day. He'll call me or I'll call him, and working in that process with him, and so seeing that, it's frail, it's beautiful, it's tender, it's difficult, and it seems that in our country or even in modern societies, it's one of the things that we all want to avoid.

And I mean, you think about some of the folks in Palo Alto area who are trying to avoid becoming old, right? Who want to live eternally. You know, the Elon Musks of the world who are doing all these kinds of things to avoid it and overcome it as if it's an engineering problem they can solve, right? And but the scripture tells us that should we live a long life, that's where we're headed. Right? And oftentimes, people sometimes use facilities or institutions to do away with because they don't want to be involved with, right? So talk to us about how we should, as Christians, as believers, think about aging and the process and how do we relate to those in our lives, whether it's family or friend who are going through that. I think it's very hard for the young sometimes to grasp that. Sure. Right? What that means, and that's a disconnect. So help us grasp a biblical view of this that can help us refine, transform how we think about it.

Troy Vugteveen: Right. Right. Well, and I think the Bible often refers to it too. They refer to the age and they refer to the wisdom that comes from that. Right. One of the things that I tell people all the time that I am so blessed with is to be around those people. And these are people of wisdom. They are people that have been through life. I tell people, "If you work," especially at Holland Home and the facilities there, "when you're working with older people, don't think that you can snow them, because you can't." They've been through life. They know. They can sniff it out if you are not being sincere, if you're not being truthful, if you're not being humble about who you are. They will sniff it out in a heartbeat. And that's a gift actually, because it helps you to become, helps me to become a better person to be around them.

And I stand amazed with the people that God brings to Trillium Living, that we get to serve, the people that we get to learn from, the people that we get to hear their life stories. And it's amazing to me too how we have some people, you talked about earlier, different CEOs or different people in our culture, that have been looked up to and they're living with us in our facilities. And what we have found is there's nothing better in life when they are living with us than for them to have that continued sense of purpose and where God continues to use their gifts. So you often think of the Bible never talks about retirement, never talks about... You know, we often think, "Okay, how many more years till I'm going to retire?" The Bible never talks about how old you're supposed to be when you retire, what that's gonna look like or what you're gonna have or not have, but it talks about continuing to serve. And so the question when you ask, you know, what does that look like there? The people that come to us, they're continuing to want to serve, so many of them, you know?

And for them to have that sense of purpose in different areas that they're able to serve in, whether it's serving in our skilled nursing areas or assisted living areas or in independent living, there's life that goes on there, and they wanna be a part of that life. And so I think when we think of aging, nowadays too, there's almost this sense of, and you brought it up, that we're gonna live forever and that we have to do everything we can to keep people alive. I know there's oftentimes... And I can tell personally from my experience with my own dad who passed away about a year and a half ago. Well, almost two years ago. But I remember, he was in skilled nursing, and he was on a special diet. And he says, "You know what? Can I get some potato chips?" And that was like a huge no-no. But we got him potato chips. You know? I mean, it's, you get to that age, and it's like—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It's important to have the dietary things there. It's important to have those regimens. Now, maybe you've earned the potato chips.

Troy Vugteveen: But you've earned the potato chips.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You're exactly right.

Troy Vugteveen: So, you know, I think there's a joy in seeing that though too, that live life to its fullest and whatever that's gonna mean or whatever that's gonna take to do that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you've talked a little bit about this already, but share with us about how this role, because you have a very prominent, important administrative role, leadership role as CEO and president, but at the same time, I'm sure that this role and what you see and experience has transformed you personally and spiritually and morally as a human being, as a man. So talk to us about both the leadership side of the house, how have you grown through this role professionally, but also personally, what's the transformation that's taken place or that continues to take place as you do both of these things?

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah, it's a great question. You know, personally, I think it's stay dusty. Stay close to Christ, and everything else will flow from that, you know? If I can learn to walk as He walked, if I can learn to be more like Him, everything else will flow out of that. Any great business book that's been written, any great leadership book that's been written, if it's truly a good book that works, it's coming from the Bible, you know? They're taking the principles that were right there in the Bible, and they're doing a good job of packaging it.

You know, in our industry, details are extremely important, and making sure that details are followed and policies and processes are followed is extremely important. And I remember we did a devotion with our leadership team, and the devotion was about Noah and Noah's Ark. And you go there and you read in Genesis about what God commanded Noah to do as far as building that ark goes. And it's laid out. I mean, it's everything is there, all the detail. And it was a reminder to us as leaders that God is a God of detail. You know, we think of God as a just God, as

a loving God, as a... He's the creator of everything. He's all-powerful. You know, what a gift to have a God like that, and he's also a God of the details. In leadership, it's important to not forget the details. And so as we talked about this devotion about Noah and how he went about building the ark and following all those details, we talked about how it's interesting that in that passage, and not to add anything to scripture or take anything away from scripture, but it's just interesting, and that's how we framed it. It's just interesting that God never talked about how big the steering wheel should be on the ship or what the rudder was supposed to look like on the ship. So there's a reason for that, that was never mentioned. And we talked about, you know, you often wonder, God, in his infinite wisdom didn't put that in there maybe because he was saying to Noah, "Don't worry about the steering wheel. Don't worry about the rudder. I'm gonna control that ship," you know?

When those waters started coming in and the rain started happening and the water started flowing from underneath the earth there and coming about, can just picture that ship, you know, going and if Noah was the one trying to steer it and direct it, he would probably have run into some mountains and some trees and some boulders and who knows what else was floating out there. But that is just, it's amazing to me that nothing happened to the ark during that time. And it's a reminder, it was a reminder to us as leadership that God expects us to run the ship. He expects us to run it with godly wisdom. But He also expects us to remember that He's the one that is driving this ship. So we talk about it from the perspective of, it's your ship, but with God-driven direction. And that was kind of a theme for ours, and everybody got a little Noah's ark to be put on their desk just to remember that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I thought that's great. Yeah, beautiful.

Troy Vugteveen: But from a leadership standpoint, I think it's just important to remember that, that God is the one that is steering the ship. He's a sovereign God. And He's sovereign over all.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And tell us personally what the journey has been like for you. Because I imagine it has to be incredible, stretching, joyful, and everything in between, right?

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah, yeah. You know, I think it's probably like so many other stories out there that people have. You, as you grow up, and I feel blessed to be raised in the family I was. And my dad was a pastor, and so I got to see that side of it, and that was a huge gift, and that was a positive experience. And then you kind of go through your high school years and your college years, and you start to get framed up for what you think you're gonna do. And I always saw myself as I wanted to be in the FBI.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So I went to school for criminal justice. I mean, you look like a FBI guy, Troy.

Troy Vugteveen: I don't know. I don't know. So, you know, I mean. So I went to school for criminal justice.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: No kidding.

Troy Vugteveen: And then with a minor in psychology. And then I knew I needed to probably get a higher degree for something like that. So I actually went to Fuller Seminary, to their school of psychology, to have the [unclear: possibly "psychology PhD" or "psychology degree"]. I wanted to have a Christian perspective with that. But then it's amazing how as you're on the ship, God starts to steer it for you, and we see there's some different opportunities there that He's opening doors for. And so, my wife and I had just gotten married shortly after I graduated from graduate school, and I knew I needed to earn a living while I was waiting for, it was called the TEA exam for the FBI at the time, and actually went to work for an organization called Quinanía Family Services. I grew up in California and that's where we were living at the time. And I was gonna be doing home inspections. I thought, "Well, that's kinda cool. I get to do home inspections and make sure everything is good with the homes." And one thing led to another there, and I ended up staying with the company for about 15 years.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Oh, wow.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so, just because doors continue to open, and it's amazing, God opens those doors and closes other ones. And then we moved to another city in Southern California that we lived in, but when we moved there, there was a person that got me interested in a senior care place that was being built at the time by three churches came together to build this senior care place. And so I ended up being there and I didn't know what I was doing, so I knew I needed to talk to somebody that knew what they were doing. And so, Dave Klaus was the president of Holland Home at the time, so I was on the phone with him all the time saying, "Dave, I don't know what

I'm doing. What do I do? What's my next move? How do I do this?" 'Cause I knew he was kind of an expert in the field, and so that was kind of the beginning of that relationship, and that's how we ended up out here. And feel very, very blessed to be at Trillium Living, and it's just a great team of people. And yeah, it's just a blessing to be there.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, I mean, it exemplifies what you mentioned about it, it's your ship, but it's God, through God-driven direction. It's beautiful. Yeah. You know, I had two amazing insights today. A student came after chapel and asked me to pray for him. I think I shared this with you before, and maybe you can comment on this as a CEO and professional and leader. He said, "Can you pray for me, Dr. Moreno-Riaño? I'm really having a hard time. I really wanna be faithful to the Lord with all that I have before me, but I'm having a hard time focusing on that and the future where I'm headed." That's what he said to me. You know, "I've got all these future things I want to accomplish, but I've got all this stuff before me, too, and I just don't know what to do with the future and with the now, so can you pray for me?"

So I did. I prayed with him and gave him counsel. But let's say the students came here and asked you the same question. You just shared with us your journey, a little bit of your journey and what the Lord did, but what advice would you give, and it's not just to students, to any of us who wrestle with those things, the future and what we want and what we think we want or where we think we need to be headed, but the now that's so full and urgent and important as well. How have you balanced both of those?

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah. First thing that comes to mind is, there's nothing new under the sun. And I think of God's Word and all the examples that He gives of people that struggle with time management or purpose or what's the next step for me in life. And it's amazing how God's Word is always relevant. You know, it doesn't matter what our culture is like, it doesn't matter what the time is, but how God's Word is always 100% true and 100% relevant. And I think of that from the perspective of even, like, time management, and what does that mean, and how do you deal with those things that are urgent?

Because for myself, I know for you, you know, your days are filled with the urgent as well as those things that you know you have to do on a daily basis. And I think of that from the perspective of, it's the priorities of life. And I think that any good leadership book is gonna say it. They're all gonna say it in different ways, but it's wherever we put our priorities. And you often hear people say, "Well, it's God, family, church, job." You know, they rank things in different orders or different ways of looking at that, or different quadrants of life. And maybe it's just as you get older in life, you begin to realize that what's most important is who Troy is, is who they're gonna see at church, who Troy is is who they're gonna see at work, who Troy is is who they're gonna see, you know, at home when he's with his wife and his kids. That there's not this separation of who we are. It's who you are, you know, through life. It's who you are. And I think you continue to learn as you go through life, too. And those things that maybe were urgent to me 20 years ago may not be that urgent right now, you know, in life.

But I do think, I think a big part of that is you have to learn to prioritize things. You have to learn to, from a practical standpoint, you know. At the end of every day, I know one of the things I'm doing is I'm looking at my calendar for the next day, 'cause I'm not smart enough to remember what I have on my calendar each day. So prioritizing, okay, what I have coming up. And also be surrounded by good people that help you to prioritize as well, too. And you can't accomplish everything, and you have to focus on what you think are gonna be those most important things. And I think also those things that are gonna bring the most glory to God, you know. So what are those things that I do daily that can be put off to later, okay. And those things that I can do now that are gonna somehow point people to Christ a little bit more.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Troy, talk to us a little about technology and aging. There's a lot of conversations now about the uses of technology to address aging concerns.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right? Yeah. I mean, several years ago I had read, it's become more popular now, and I'm sure you know much more about it than I do, but the use of robots, for example, in Japan, to help the elderly have conversations because families weren't visiting them, or they were all alone and they had no family, so they would bring a robot to have conversations with them.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And so there was a lot of controversy about that. Except when you spoke to the resident, they seemed to like it. Right? Right?

Troy Vugteveen: Right, right.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And that's become much more prevalent now, the use of technology to address the concerns of aging, to address problems in aging, maybe the lack of social relationships, loneliness, all these things. How are you in Trillium thinking about the use of those kinds of technologies or artificial intelligence technologies to address issues of aging concerns, longevity, loneliness? What's the conversation like at Trillium about these things that are here already and will continue to come our way?

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah. The first thing when you mentioned that, the first thing that went through my mind was if any of my leadership team that I am working with closely on a daily basis see this podcast for any reason, they're probably gonna laugh that you're asking me the question about technology. So I just, I was forced to have to join LinkedIn just recently. And I absolutely hate it, hate it, hate it, so. But it's one of those necessary evils is what I'm learning from our PR company.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right, right.

Troy Vugteveen: So I'm happy to do it. Right. So, but to your question, you're right. I mean, right now in our industry, and I can say in the state of Michigan, there are over 34,000 open healthcare positions right now.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: 34,000.

Troy Vugteveen: Over 34,000 open positions that need to be filled.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Wow.

Troy Vugteveen: And I think the concern is obviously as the aging population grows, right now, it's really about one in four. There's one caregiver to every four seniors. Soon that's gonna be one caregiver to every six, and that's gonna just continue to increase because there are not enough caregivers out there. So technology does play a significant role in what's gonna happen. It's already playing a role. You often find in senior facilities that they'll have robots for dining services that bring the plates out and different things like that. I think AI is gonna play a big role in it. In our industry, probably where we're seeing it the most right now is gonna be in our finance department and also in data analytics. Those are the two areas that we're focused on right now.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Sure, sure. Sure, yep.

Troy Vugteveen: Data analytics is very important to us because the data helps to tell the story. Everybody can say they're the memory care expert in our industry, but how do you prove that? How do you know you're the memory care expert? It's gonna be your data that's gonna show that, you know? So AI, we're looking at it for that. You have some good people connected to you, to Cornerstone.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Um, not to throw out names like Mark Johnson—

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: But he's on our board as well too.

Troy Vugteveen: Sure. And he's been very instrumental for me in helping to understand AI. Sure.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And how quickly do you move into it, how much do you—

Troy Vugteveen: He'll be helping to teach one of our AI courses here too.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's great. We've got a great guy.

Troy Vugteveen: So that's great. Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, and that's been one of the things I know that you guys are looking at as well too. And I think with Cornerstone, you guys are ahead of the game actually, because you're looking at those... You've been looking at it for a while, actually. It's not something that's new to Cornerstone, looking at the whole thing of AI.

So for us though, I do think, you know, down the road, robots could be a part of caregiving, especially in people's homes and helping with things. You know, we've seen it for a number of years already with those vacuums and different things like that. But without a doubt, because there's not gonna be enough caregivers for people down the road, we will have to rely on technology and the impact that that can have, the positive impact it can have, so.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You know, I told my mom that I was gonna get a robot to help her. She almost beat me down. She said, "Don't you dare do that." She said, "I want you to do it, not a robot." So when I ask that question, but it's a very serious question, right?

Troy Vugteveen: Yes.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. I mean, on the one hand, you can have a machine to be very proficient, and I've looked into some of these things. It's incredible what they can do, but the importance of the human touch, of another being made in God's image with a soul, with a heart that you know loves you and hears. Right? So how... I'm sure you're having some of these conversations already at Trillium. What's the tenor of the conversation?

Troy Vugteveen: It's exactly what you just said. So earlier, I mentioned how a number of senior facilities are using robots for things like in dining services. We looked at it, and we saw maybe there could be some potential, but the thing that steered us away from it was the residents wanna see people. They want to have that interaction, even if it's bringing a plate to their table. And so we decided to... That doesn't mean it's wrong or for other places that do it. And for some residents, they love it. It's kinda cool. You have this robot that comes up and gives the plate or whatever. It's just a little cart that comes up, and then they take it off. But for us, at this time at least, we said if we can continue to have the staffing and to have a model that promotes the relationship side of it, that's what we wanna focus on.

And so, again, I think there's a purpose for it, and I think those that are using it, it's a good thing for them. And for us, it's been something we've held off on for right now, not because we couldn't do it. We could easily do it, but it's not the answer to everything. And you're right. It's the relationship piece of it that people are yearning for. It's isolation that creates so many of the challenges for people right now, especially in senior care. It's those that are isolated, you see more mental health challenges. Loneliness is a big thing for seniors.

And so having that interaction, I think that's where church is. That's where places like Cornerstone with students, we try to even link up residents with students and other people so that they have that relationship component, which is gonna continue to be even more important as we get into later years here.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: And please connect with us about that if we can do more.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah, yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I mean, we just had a wonderful legacy reunion of alums from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Yeah. We have over 100 of these alums here. My wife and I sat there for an hour or so on a Saturday morning, and I just remember she and I both commented on the beauty of seeing these alums speak about the Lord and their life and their journey and what Cornerstone meant. And immediately we both said we want more of our students connected to them somehow. So just let us know, and maybe we can think of other ways of doing it.

Troy Vugteveen: Right.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: The last question, Troy, is for you to give us advice on how we plan for aging. You're a professional in this. And I say that because today there was a guest on our campus who just recently turned 80, and this individual shared with us, some on our campus, "I just went to the funeral home to plan for my own funeral," and said it was such a weird experience. And it made me think of I haven't done that. Right? I've not thought about that. I've not planned for that. So help us to think through what should we be doing to plan appropriately and thoughtfully for our own aging.

Troy Vugteveen: Yeah, yeah. I think that's a great question. And there's — the first thing that went through my mind was, again, stay close to Christ. As we continue to age, stay close to Christ because there's just hope in that. And as we get older, we begin to see more of our frailty. You know, right now, I think it's 70,000 people just in the state of Michigan have a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. And with that you have 400,000 family caregivers that are caring for those people as well, too. I mean, it just shows what the need is out there. And, you know, as we get older, those things are gonna begin to happen. But to your question, you know, what do you do to prepare for it?

There's all those things, estate planning, that you can meet with your estate planners, and you meet with different people to look at your trust and your will. And you wanna do that when you're younger, too, but sometimes people wait till they're older. And the funeral home thing and dealing with all that stuff, you know. And Holland Home has people that can help people walk through those steps and look into those things. But I would say, the simple answer is, stay close to Christ. And, you know, it's amazing how the hope of that helps carry you through the rest of where life is going to take you.

And I would also say, one thing that I hear from seniors, and I have the opportunity to pray with a lot of them in skilled nursing, those that are on hospice or anything. I don't hear regrets often, but I do hear, you can never be in God's word enough. You can never be in God's word enough.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Really?

Troy Vugteveen: And, you know, don't miss out on that. And it's, that's one of the blessings of being there. I'm reminded of that all the time, is, stay in God's word. And, you know, it's a huge gift to have that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Troy, thank you for being with us. Thank you for all you do for West Michigan and for so many lives that you and your team are touching.

Troy Vugteveen: Thank you so much. It's my pleasure, and I'm blessed to be a part of Cornerstone here and all that you continue to do. Thank you. And we're excited because we see how you are shaping the minds of students and others that hopefully can someday be connected to Trillium someday.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Amen. It's the Lord with us and a great team of faculty and staff, I will tell you, and people praying and partners. So, Troy, it, as you know, it's a huge team effort.

Troy Vugteveen: Yep.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you, Troy.

Troy Vugteveen: Yep, yep. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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