



### **Letter of Recommendation for Clay Lawrence**

Dear Taylor Haugen Foundation Members, All-Sports Association Members, and Taylor Haugen Trophy Winners:

My name is Paul Barnett and I am the Youth Pastor at Point Washington United Methodist Church in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida. I am writing to you regarding the nomination of Clay Lawrence for the Taylor Haugen Trophy. In my 20 year career in Youth Ministry I have worked with over a thousand teenagers and have written countless recommendations for students. Some of my students have gone on to be lawyers, ministers, military officers, PhD students, Peace Corps volunteers, medical professionals, school teachers, West Point cadets, and even a Taylor Haugen Trophy winner. However, as impressive as these students are, I have never been more proud to have my name connected to an applicant or more sure of an applicant's worthiness in receiving the award for which they were nominated. I am certain that if you were to put your name on Clay Lawrence by selecting him to receive this award, like me, you would be able to take pride in being associated with such an outstanding young man.

Clay has many superlative qualities that make him so remarkable; including his compassion, his work ethic, his intelligence, his confidence, his faith, his thoughtfulness, his respectfulness, his joy, his discipline, his passion, his determination, and his leadership. But, above all else, Clay's defining traits are his high level of moral character and his integrity. Clay lives his life by a strict moral code where in every instance he attempts to always do the right thing, no matter how difficult and no matter what it may cost him to do so. The content of Clay's character is unmatched and I am certain that he would represent the Taylor Haugen Foundation and the All-Sports Association with absolute honor and dignity were he given the opportunity.

As Clay's Youth Pastor for the past 7 years I feel that I am specifically qualified to speak to 3 of the 5 pillars that define a Taylor Haugen Trophy recipient: Faith, Community Service, and Leadership.

Clay is a deeply faithful young person. Clay's faith in Jesus and his commitment to the Way of Christ is the driving force in his life. Clay has been actively involved in our church for the past 8 years and in our youth group for the past 7 years. In this time I have witnessed Clay grow physically from a boy to a man and grow spiritually from a spiritual baby into a fully devoted follower of Jesus. Clay's commitment to Jesus is demonstrated in many ways, including: all of the personal characteristics listed above, regular service to others, consistently asking questions that help him go deeper in his faith...never being satisfied with a stagnant or cliched faith, near perfect attendance at all church functions year after year, numerous times of publicly sharing his testimony, being mentored by older men and then himself mentoring a handful of younger students, and most importantly in how he treats others, especially his service to those who in our society may be considered "the least of these."

Clay's commitment to community service (which is driven by his faith in Jesus and following His Way) is unmatched by any young person that I have ever known. I saw this side of Clay begin to grow when, as a middle school student, he served in our church's Children's Ministry and on several local service projects. However, it was in his freshman year of high school that I really saw his heart for service bloom. That year, while only 14 years old, Clay took over as the leader of a student-led program that we have in our Youth Ministry called "Mission:PoWash." This program, which Clay has spearheaded for all 4 years of his high school career, focuses on planning and implementing monthly service projects to assist and serve those in need in our local community. As the head of this program Clay has had to recruit and lead a planning committee made up of his peers, contact and set up projects with local non-profit organizations and/or individual people and families in need, and recruit and manage participants for the projects. Through Mission:PoWash Clay has led his peers to serve with organizations such as: Habitat for Humanity, Special Olympics, Alaqua Animal Refuge, Stop Hunger Now, Destin Crop Drop, Operation Christmas Child, Compassion International, the South Walton Elf Ride, Somerby Senior Living, and more. He has also assisted in planning and leading multiple disaster relief trips to Panama City, Port Saint Joe, and Albany, Georgia. I do not think that I can over emphasize the fact that Clay did not just attend these monthly service projects over the past 4 years, but he was the driving force in planning and leading these efforts.

Another program that our Youth Ministry offers in which Clay's service is instrumental in is our weekly discipleship program for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students called "Club 56." Club 56 meets every Thursday afternoon during the school year and at Club 56 there is time for freetime, games, a message, small group Bible study, and homework time. Clay has volunteered with this program since its inception in 2017. Every week (except during tennis season) Clay consistently shows up and he spends 3 hours welcoming students, helping them with homework, helping run games, helping set up and break down, and most importantly, leading a group of 4 or 5 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade boys in small group Bible study. These 10 and 11 year old boys look up to Clay and he uses that influence to lead and point them to Jesus and to help them to fully become the person that God has created them to be.

And while Clay's desire to serve our local community is impressive, his heart for those in need does not end at the Florida state line. Clay has eagerly attended every weeklong summer mission trip that our Youth Ministry has offered since he was old enough to participate. As a freshman Clay served for a week in the poverty-stricken rural Southwest Arkansas town of Marvell, followed by a second week spent serving people of the Lakota-Sioux Nation on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The following summer, as a sophomore Clay spent a week serving the needy of inner-city New Orleans. Then as a junior in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, Clay spent a week in Houston, Texas helping rebuild houses of those who lost everything in the storm. This past summer Clay returned to Marvell, Arkansas to continue to help and build relationships with those that he served as a freshman. On each of these trips Clay's heart for serving others is evident. He is driven by his love and compassion for others. Clay has the innate ability to see others hurting and a strong desire to alleviate people's suffering wherever he encounters it.

The last of the 3 pillars that I can speak to is Clay's leadership. Clay is what I call a "servant leader" and I strongly believe that there is no greater way to lead others than by serving them first. It is the model that Jesus

sets for us as His followers and it is that example that Clay strives to follow. Clay's leadership is defined by the following 3 characteristics:

- Clay is a hard worker. I have worked with Clay on many work projects and time and time again I have seen him work circles around many of the other participants. Through his example of hard work people are inspired to also give their best effort in working toward the completion of the project.
- Clay is confident yet humble. He has a confidence that comes from having a strong sense of self, but his confidence never manifests as arrogance. Instead, he uses his confidence to lift up and inspire others to pursue a better version of themselves.
- Clay treats everyone around him equally and with dignity. On many occasions I have seen Clay go out of his way to engage those who do not fit in and who many would see as outcasts. He cares for each person that he encounters and does everything in his power to help people feel cared for and welcome.

Clay's deep faith, heart for service, and natural leadership qualities are extremely rare for a person his age or any age for that matter. The positive qualities that he possesses and that he exhibits are qualities for which we should all strive and they are what I believe uniquely qualify him for the award that you are currently considering. Thank you for your consideration of Clay Lawrence for this high honor. If you have any questions about Clay or just want to hear more good things about him please call me anytime at 850.461.4213.

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