

Introducing the 2023 Baillie Volunteer Service Award Recipients

Ashleen Finbow (Norval United Church, Georgetown)



Ashleen has been an active member of Norval United since childhood. She volunteered for five years as a counsellor at the congregation's day camp, including as a Junior Volunteer, a High School volunteer, and then part of the Core Leader team. She also volunteers regularly in Norval's Kids Church. At community dinners and other fundraisers, Ashleen is always willing to step in and lend a hand. This past Christmas, she led the Family Christmas Eve service when the minister was unable to make it in due to the snow. Recently Ashleen became a member of the search team at NUC as they seek to replace one of the ministry staff. She is a gift to the community, bringing her voice and her work to help make space for all different people to be involved.

Adam Gayler (Scarborough Bluffs United Church, Scarborough)



Adam has helped put up and take down the church's large chancel banners for the different seasons for many years, a physically laborious and difficult task. Adam also often helps with the church elevator, assisting congregation members and guests who require the use of the elevator to attend church services or various fundraising and musical events. Adam has been a huge help with church property maintenance when a strong back was needed for moving heavy items that the Monday Morning Work Crew (whose other members are of more advanced age) required help with.

Maya Gazzard (St. Davids United Church, Queenston)



Having grown up at St. Davids, at the age of 15, Maya volunteered to become the congregation's Sunday School teacher when their long-time teacher stepped down. Maya works with the Minister to develop the weekly Sunday school lesson and is also an active participant in children's time in the Sanctuary. Maya was instrumental in developing and rolling out St. Davids' Safe Haven Youth Group in October 2022, which provides a safe and welcoming space twice monthly for youth 13 to 17 years of age in the area. In March of 2023, Maya established a highly successful clothing drive, encouraging the congregation to donate tarpaulins, gloves, mittens and socks for the St. Andrew's United Church's Out of the Cold Program.



Olyndra Irving (Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council/Stayner United Church, Stayner)

As a rather, quiet and 'behind the scenes' kind of person, Olyndra offers leadership wherever she goes and compassionate concern to all those around her. At Stayner United she volunteers with the community free lunch program, organizes and leads the church school program, plays piano, reads stories and runs the technology for worship. She created a float for the Santa Claus parade, offers programming for the congregation's youth group, and helped create a food justice video for the National United Church audience. At school she is on the Student Senate and organized the collection of personal care items for community donation. In the broader community, she volunteers as a lifeguard, participates in community fundraisers, and offers dance instruction on a volunteer basis.



Jonisha Lewinson (United Church of Canada General Council Office, Toronto)

Jonisha was a participant in the United Church's Young Black Scholarship Program in 2021, which conducts research on Black experiences in Canadian churches. Her research focus was on the impact of these experiences on Black mental health in Canadian churches. Besides a written report on her research and a written blog, she also produced two spoken word videos depicting the state of mental health among Black congregants. As an extension of the program, together with four other Black youths, she led the research team working on a curriculum for Anti-Racism for Youth Training (AR4YT) and then oversaw the curriculum development of AR4YT.

Video: So I Wait, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hr_O4hTJ954

Blog: Learning to Love Myself
<https://united-church.ca/stories/40-days-anti-racism-learning-love-myself>



Christopher Niemela (St. Mark's United Church, Scarborough)

Christopher is vital member of St Mark's, always willing to volunteer for any event. From helping with the garage sale to turkey dinner, he chips in by moving furniture, greeting people, and making sure things run smoothly behind the scenes. Christopher also provides music as needed, playing guitar for concerts and drums in service. Before COVID he was a regular member of youth group and presentations/plays in service. At University, along with several students in his program at Ontario Tech, Christopher formed a new departmental group and got formal approval from the University Senate. Now heading into his fourth year, he is President of the group as well as Vice Chair of the Business Student Union.



Kayin Paul (Birchcliff Bluffs United Church, Scarborough)

Kayin began attending Sunday School at Birchcliff Bluffs at a young age. A great ambassador, she encouraged her friends to join and bring their parents. Kayin took leading roles in the congregation's drama group, Shower Curtain Productions, volunteered in the nursery, and assisted at various fundraising events. Kayin is a member of the choir, where she has acted as a section lead as well as sung solos on Sundays and performed at special events. Kayin began attending Toby's Place (the 2SLGBTQIA+ youth drop-in at Birchcliff Bluffs) after it opened in the fall of 2017. This spring, Kayin volunteered at Toby's Place in a leadership role, supporting the new program leaders. She is also serving as a director of Rainbow Community Place, the corporation incorporated to take over the Toby's Place youth and Dorothy's Place seniors programs.



Ally Phillips (Silver Spire United Church, St. Catharines)

Ally is the Youth Leader at Silver Spire UC. It is under his leadership that Queer Kid Bible Camp was created with programming for queer kids and allies. He also incorporated programming and support for the parents of queer kids. Ally has been key in creating partnerships for Silver Spire with Pride Niagara and OutNiagara. Under his leadership the church has become a member of Niagara Transgender Action Coalition and Transcending Binaries and has opened its space to host for many more group and events such as Transgender Day of Visibility and Transgender Day of Remembrance. Ally has mobilized a great team of volunteers, himself among them, to ensure that inclusivity is not just a word, but an action at Silver Spire.



Robin Roach (Grace United, Brampton)

At Grace United, Robin teaches Sunday School each week with patience and humour. During services, she reads the scripture and acts as Presider, and often volunteers to host the coffee fellowship hour. Robin always steps in to assist with special church events and fundraisers. She was on the planning committee for a recent Spring Fundraiser, managing the kitchen and servers. She was also an enthusiastic participant in a youth project which created a quilt during Black History Month to commemorate the Underground Railroad. Robin was a member of a committee which worked to form a youth group in the church and her valuable input led to her being invited to join the new minister search committee. Through the United Church of Canada, Robin has been given an opportunity to participate in a conversation between Canadian youth and Palestinian youth this summer. Robin also volunteers in various capacities with Regeneration Outreach which serves the homeless and those living in extreme poverty in Brampton.



Grace Sturman (St. Paul's United Church, Bowmanville)

A long-term member of St Paul's United, Grace has led the congregation in responding to some tragic gaps in the community. She established a non-perishable food pantry at the church, hosting drive-by donation days to keep it stocked, and created a local Facebook page called CARE Bowmanville that connects local people with food to share with those in need. Next, she dreamt up The Bread of Life Social Justice Cafe that runs weekly in the church hall, serving reasonably priced, delicious food. Those that can pay do, and those that can't pay, use coupons. Under Grace's supervision, the café continues to grow its reach and all profits are used for social justice initiatives. Grace has also hosted potlucks to provide social connection for seniors and instigated a speaker series on the theme of healthy, safe living for seniors. She has created new partnerships and raised the congregation's profile in the community, energized the church members, and raised awareness of where justice work is still needed.



Victoria Vickers (Islington United Church, Toronto)

Since her early years at Islington United, Victoria has offered her time to numerous activities. She has served as a leader of the Godly Play program, held leadership roles at summer vacation bible camps, and been an active participant with the GO Project. Always involved in choir, she now serves on the Senior Choir executive committee. This year she was engaged in raising funds and organizing a choir trip to Newfoundland. In 2018, Victoria helped launch Islington's Resonance Worship project which explores new ways of worshipping, offering hospitality, and building community, engaging a new generation at Islington. During the pandemic, Victoria kept the choir connected by organizing virtual events and sending cards to those who were grieving, unwell, or celebrating milestones. Victoria is pursuing her dream of becoming an art therapist and leads a mentoring program at The Hospital for Sick Children where she helps kids with pain management using art.



Ian Wood (North Bramalea United Church, Brampton)

Ian Wood has been instrumental in leading North Bramalea's tech area over the past several years. He has helped run the congregation's studio and Sunday morning online stream. Ian is at the church after school one day a week and stays for worship practice night each Wednesday. He also is there every Sunday morning to support the Sunday morning worship service. Ian has learned North Bramalea's tech systems so that he can run everything as well as anyone on the team. He is even able to fill in for the full time Tech Lead when he is away.