TUCC

Introducing the 2026 Baillie Volunteer Service Award Recipients

Charlie Bolton (Norval United Church, Horseshoe Falls)

Charlie is a dedicated young leader at Norval. As a member of the Worship Team, they participate in worship planning, scripture reading, and communion leadership. They have represented Norval in Toward 2035 discussions, bringing the perspective of young people to wider church conversations about the future. They are an active member of Norval's Teen Leadership Group, helping plan and lead youth-led worship services, children's and youth programs, and outreach initiatives. Charlie is gifted at building connections across generations, mentoring younger children through church programs. They support Norval's Affirming Ministry and advocate for LGBTQIA+ inclusion and belonging within their school community. Charlie is deeply committed to their faith, eager to learn and grow, and already making a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

Francis Adu Gyamfi (New Vision United Church, Horseshoe Falls)

Francis participates in planning and presenting worship at New Vision, a lay-led congregation. His moving, well-presented and relatable sermons leave the community feeling enriched. Although Francis works two jobs, he always finds time to attend worship services. In his humble and unassuming way, he is quick to help others, whether by welcoming newcomers, assisting community members to complete forms, or sending encouraging messages to folks who need it. He is an active member of the Newcomer Spirituality Group and has participated in preparation of and staffing New Vision's Pride Booth at city-wide Pride celebrations.

Azrael Hackshaw (Emmanuel United Church, Hamilton, Western Ontario Waterways)

Azrael has been active in United Church life since his arrival in Canada in 2013. He is proficient in multiple instruments and has won several awards at music festivals around improvisation and traditional hymns. On a volunteer basis, he records the music for Crawford United and Emmanuel United, as well as travelling to Crawford United to assist with their ministry. He was elected as a Youth Representative to the 45th General Council held in Calgary and was actively involved in the youth programs. He encourages his peers to attend and participate in church worship, has preached at several youth services, and participates in a youth Bible study group.

Makenna Haldenby (Lucknow United Church, Western Ontario Waterways)

At Lucknow, Makenna helps with the Sunday School, teaching songs, leading story time, and assisting with crafts. Makenna is a wonderful storyteller and shares her love of baking with the kids, making and decorating sweet treats with them. At Christmas, she narrates and helps behind the scenes with the children's pageant. Makenna assists in worship services and even presents the sermon on occasion when the Worship Team is leading service. In particular, she has assisted in planning and leading the annual Silver Lake United Church Camp worship service. She also helps with serving and clean up for fellowship hour. Makenna recently joined the Outreach Committee and, in this role, organized a very successful drive to collect personal hygiene and wellness items for the Northern Huron Connection Center.

Avery Harris (North Runnymede United Church, Shining Waters)

At North Runnymede United, Avery is a lay scripture reader on most Sundays. They are also active in the music ministry, playing the accordion and sometimes leading in singing. Avery is a leader in Vacation Bible Camp, the 68th Scout Group, and serves as Committee Chair of Outreach on Runnymede's board. Avery has also preached during Youth Sunday and in summer.

Christian Karuhanga (Uganda Martyrs United Church, Shining Waters)

Christian is an active member of the Uganda Martyrs Youth Ministry and an exceptional young leader who goes above and beyond in supporting youth programs and initiatives. He has played a vital role in the planning and execution of the church's annual youth camp, serving as a member of the leadership team and helping to create meaningful experiences that strengthen faith, fellowship, and personal growth. He regularly organizes youth prayer gatherings and Bible study sessions, creating safe and welcoming spaces where young people can grow in their relationship with God, support one another, and navigate life's challenges. He also recognizes the importance of community engagement and has organized soccer tournaments and recreational activities that bring young people together, fostering positive social interaction and a sense of belonging.

Benjamin Parkinson (Grace United Church, Sarnia, Antler River Watershed)

Benjamin has been volunteering at Grace for many years. He assists with children's worship for grades 4-8 and plans activity nights for children of the same age range. He is part of the team who runs the audiovisual booth on Sundays and for other events. He is also one of the founding members of the church's bell ritual, which was designed to help foster connection on Sundays at the church. He participates in Grace's Men's Dinners, leading conversations surrounding difficult life chapters. Pre-pandemic, he was a helper with Grace's monthly luncheons and fall fairs. He has also volunteered for Community Living dances hosted at Grace, creating a fun and welcoming environment for Community Living clients and staff.

Florence Powell (Port Nelson United Church, Horseshoe Falls)

Florence is a dedicated member of Port Nelson, whose volunteer service has had a meaningful impact within the church and community. Florence volunteers regularly with Port Nelson's Meals of Hope program. She is actively involved in the church's Greening Ministry and has participated in community clean-ups, advocacy letter writing, and environmental initiatives within the church. She also volunteers at church events including Mistletoe Mart, Affirming ministry events, and community gatherings. Florence is compassionate toward both people and animals, fostering animals and helping care for a rescued school fish. Her empathy, initiative, and commitment to serving others makes her an exceptional young leader.

Ruwani Seevakireedam (Tamil United Church, Shining Waters)

Ruwani coordinates the church's youth activities, weekly Bible Study, and special youth services at Tamil United, fostering a welcoming environment for young members to strengthen their spiritual relationship. Whether through assigning roles for musical worship, supporting preaching opportunities, or creating outlets for creative expression, Ruwani ensures every youth member is able to contribute. Last year, Ruwani transitioned to Secretary of the Church Executive Board, where she had previously served as a member-at-large. During meetings, she validates key point and takes detailed minutes. She practices good information management principles so that records are safely stored and easily accessible. Ruwani was recently re-selected unanimously as the Secretary for 2026/2027.

Jabari Sezirahiga (Hope Springs United Church, Western Ontario Waterways)

Since his family joined Hope Springs, Jabari has grown into a dedicated young leader. Jabari serves on the Worship AV Team, shares his musical gifts with the Praise Team, and has led worship, sharing his faith journey with the congregation. Jabari volunteered as a cabin leader at Kids Across the Region and brings his passion for camp back to the kids at Hope Springs. Recently he joined a mission trip to El Salvador. Jabari also contributes to church leadership, getting involved with the 100 Tables Project, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival fundraiser, and the search for a new minister. His faith, generosity, and leadership make him a role model and an inspiration to the community.

Blessing Tiriwepi (St. Paul's United Church, Thunder Bay, Canadian Shield)

Blessing is a dedicated young leader at St. Paul's and in the United Church regionally and nationally. At St. Paul's, Blessing is Music Director of the African Praise Choir and leads the choir during Intercultural Prayer Meetings. Blessing serves on the Worship and Communications Committees, contributing energy and innovative ideas. He is one of St. Paul's Youth Leaders, offering guidance and organizing youth activities. Regionally, Blessing serves on the YAYA Resource Team for youth and was recently part of the team providing music leadership for the annual Clergy Retreat and the Canadian Shield Regional Council AGM. Blessing was a Commissioner to General Council 45 and attended the General Council Youth Forum. In 2025, he was one of the coordinators of the United Church's Climate Motivator Program. Through music, youth ministry, and climate action, Blessing brings energy, faith, and leadership to the Church.

Abigail Walker (Port Elgin United, Western Ontario Waterways)

Abigail (Abbie) has been volunteering at Port Elgin since she was 13 years old. She volunteers with the nursery, weekly Discovery Cove (Sunday School), as well as church-run camp days. Abbie takes initiative, recognizing the needs of each camp or event. For example, she took a First Aid Course so she would be prepared to work with children. She is an active member of Port Elgin's Youth Group, bringing enthusiastic questions to discussions and getting involved in the youth programs, including fundraising efforts and lunches after worship. She is always willing to offer assistance to those who need aid – including seniors and neurodivergent kids.