



**TERNOPIL, UKRAINE**  
***4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2015 Report***

**October**

Greetings dear friends!

Again it's a time to write you. In this letter I would like to tell you about our work to educate church leaders. And of course, I hope that you will strengthen your prayers for the people who join us.

Recently I heard about a prayer by a pastor in another city. He prayed, "Lord, You are risking very much by entrusting to us Your work on Earth. Help us, God, not to fail You.... " This prayer really reflects something that I feel lately—responsibility and fear. Day follows day; and month follows month; you look at the calendar, and another year has passed. And how many are the things that you would like to have accomplished in the ministry that are not yet done. There's nothing else to do except to pray for workers in the harvest field of God! Friends, support us in prayer for more workers for our Lord.

The Lord opens a lot of opportunities. There are many services in our church, not because we have them well organized, but to the contrary. In other words, they are by the grace of the Lord. People with almost no training are stepping forward to help in ministry. Sometimes they are people with no training at all, but they are simply enthusiasts who assist with services. The Lord opens the door for different projects. We try to manage everything: some things go better than others, some things not as well as desired, other things remain desires and dreams.

In order to make our leaders more effective, I began to hold regular meetings for training leaders. For these meetings we invited only leaders from the church's membership (we have some people who are not yet church members of the church, but are helping in services). We meet once every two weeks. Often, for all of us, it is an opportunity to talk about something painful; sometimes the meeting sparks a very hot discussion on some current topic. Recently, we had a meeting in which we discussed the use of music in services, that is, not using music which is not acceptable to the Lord in ministry. The discussion turned out to be instructive for everyone. Not so long ago, we were talking about how to teach leaders to organize and supervise services. Please pray for our brothers and sisters who have taken upon themselves this responsibility. Some of our leaders have trouble at work because of the service; another has difficulties with family. Almost all leaders have responsibilities in several ministries due to the fact that the church is small and there are multiple ministries.

One of the most urgent needs at this moment is for a youth leader (youth pastor). We have a number of young people in the church, and not small number of youth who have drawn close to the church. Many pass through the summer camps, we meet with them at various meetings – but it's not so easy to keep them in the church. Most of our leaders, although not old, are people with families and small children. In addition, they already have responsibilities for other duties. We really need a brother who loves the Lord and young people, someone ready to spend time with them, organize them, to take care of their needs... Friends, pray for such a man!

From time to time we lose someone, because we do not have time to do everything. For all of us it hurts when young people leave the church and begin to live in sin. At such moments, we have blamed ourselves, assuming it is our fault because we did not do something. As a result, many leaders fall into depression because of "guilt." But there is a simple law of the harvest: Some grains will tumble to the ground if there are not enough workers in the harvest field.

We look forward to a reply from God for our need.

## **November**

Peace to you, dear friends!

It's nice to write to you about our dreams, needs, and state of affairs.

I realize that everyone who supports our ministry financially and with prayers await such letters. Yet, I confess to you that these letters bring to me personally no less pleasure than to you. For me, this is always a time to do what is mentioned by the prophet in Isaiah 63:7, "I will mention the lovingkindnesses **of the Lord**, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses." Sometimes it turns out that you get tired in ministry, or because of certain difficulties a time of sadness comes – you sit to write such a letter, and you begin to remember His compassion and generosity in the past month—and immediately everything releases and the heart becomes lighter and you look at this world with new eyes.

As you know, through His servants God gave us a building for the church. Of course it was for us very good news. But later, when the emotions passed, we felt little responsibility before God for the opportunity He has provided. As soon as we could, we started to hold our "small meetings" (Bible study group, educating leaders, children's meetings, youth club, preparation for baptisms, fraternal organization meeting of the Board, a rehearsal of the musical group) in that room. We started to pray for the opportunity to pursue at least a minimum program. In the "minimum program" we have included: to prepare the room Sunday church services, to prepare the hall for worship. At the same time, we need to install two restrooms, including for people in wheelchairs. And of course the front needs to make clear that this is the location of a church and should have a roofed porch at the main entrance. Also in this letter, I want to thank the mission for funds to repair the premises with the essentials. Of course, the unpleasant surprises happen right along with the pleasant things. When we bought this location, we thought that the water heating system was almost ready, but things were not as easy as they seemed. The boiler room was normal and did not require much investment. But rust had destroyed some equipment, probably due to the fact that the room had not been used for several years and water remained in the system.... We had to hire specialists and redo it.

Because the premises will be redone to fit the needs of the church, all changes must correspond to new laws, which means new spending on electrical equipment. We had hoped that everything could remain as it was. We're glad that people from the church take responsibility and lend their services, helping in various needs connected with the conversion. Due to the fact that we do repairs while using the building, we constantly need to do "general" cleaning. Sisters and brothers of the church themselves do the work.

Please, pray for all the repair works, the resources for this, for all permits from state agencies.

Thank you for money that you provide through the mission. It opens up the possibility of step-by-step carrying out a minimum program.

## December

Greetings to you, dear friends!

There's no greater joy than to observe the changes that happen in people's lives. Especially when the Lord is the One bringing the changes. And if you yourself have played a role in bringing about these changes, then that is many times more valuable. Here we have the honor of seeing that in reality.

I would like to share about this with you, because our ministry exists by your prayers and your financial support. In upcoming letters I will tell about other fruit from the ministry, but today I want to tell about Maksim.

Today Maksim is 37. He was 35 when he first came to us. In his life there was so much evil that I don't even know how to begin describing it. He came to us in a terrible condition, both spiritually and physically. Later on, he would say of himself, "I came to you to die." This form of the word "to die" is one they use to describe the death of an animal. Looking at him, you could see the unfortunate expression of a man who's been backed into a corner. He was like a walking mummy. He was hooked on drugs and had hit rock bottom. In such a state, they say it's simpler to list which sicknesses the person does not have. He had tuberculosis, two kinds of hepatitis (B and C). But sadder than anything was his situation with HIV. People with HIV often come to us. But he didn't simply have the infection—he was in the final stages of AIDS. When he came to us, an analysis of his blood showed 10 cells of immune system (CD-4). By way of comparison, a normal person has 1000-1200 cells, and a sportsman 1300. The absence of the immune system paved the way for Oncology. All over his body were cancerous cells. Such a sad picture. When he came to us, our Rehabilitation Center was not going through the very best time. We were experiencing a crisis concerning the ministers—we had changed ministers. We changed the order and reviewed our relationship regarding various things.

When we began to work with him, we saw how God began His work of changing him. The pages of his past were gloomy. He had spent over 12 years in prison. Although Maksim had come from a well-to-do family (his mother was a teacher and a very well-educated woman), he had chosen the criminal world. He'd tried to become a tough guy among criminals. In prison he often opposed the system. He spent many days in a punishment cell for one person. He tried to demonstrate his faithfulness to the principles of the criminal system. And so his dream of rising in rank to become a leader of thieves materialized: He was made a criminal coordinator for one of the oblasts of Ukraine. In their explanatory conversation with him, senior criminals told him something that disappointed him. They said he had to collaborate with the police. He was disappointed to the extreme. He didn't understand why he'd fought against the system? Why did he have to prove that he was so tough by opposing the system if in the end he would have to work with the system against which he had fought for 12 years in prison? For the sake of a serious career in the criminal world he had even forsaken his mother in order to be invulnerable. But now they told him, "You must collaborate!" Here in the higher echelons of the world he had dreamed about there was great hypocrisy... This was a moment of great disappointment. The moment that brought down all his dreams.

If, up to that moment, he had simply experimented with various drugs, then afterward he plunged wholly into total sin. And so all these sicknesses and evidences of sin came into his life. Before coming to our Rehabilitation Center, he'd already experienced an unsuccessful time with rehab, but in the end it all concluded sadly. Instead of ministry to God, he quickly became the leader of the rehabilitants of that center and instead of changing he brought his criminal understanding to that rehabilitation center. In the end, he fell even deeper into the abyss.

He had a very hard time in our rehabilitation center. He had been a leader before, but here he was obligated to listen to others. Changes took place step by step. On one hand, he was backed into a corner. He understood that

the life offered to him at the rehabilitation center was better than the life that remained to him. But when he gained insight and awareness of his sins, everything changed. He latched onto the Lord as his last chance. This tough guy started to take on any job in the rehabilitation. He began to help others, which was unnatural according to his earlier principles. We saw, and rejoiced.

Today, as I describe him, I still experience a certain feeling of caution. To say that there is no longer any problem would not be correct. But I think he deserves a new title: "The Maxim of today." He did not want to return to his home in central Ukraine. He does not see himself anywhere other than our church. Today he is a cheerful fellow. A man of prayer, who knows that his every breath is by the mercy of God. If he bangs his thumb in the course of his work, then he knows this is because he didn't pray about the work in advance. Maksim, the man who came to us as a "dying mummy" is a very needed person in many church matters. He is a good organizer. Because the Lord gave him leadership skills, he is valuable in organizing laborers for the repair of the church building. He seems to have enough enthusiasm and energy for ten people. By God's mercy, he has been healed of most of his afflictions. There is no trace of tuberculosis, no cancer, and one type of hepatitis has disappeared. Yet, the real miracle and testimony is the situation with HIV. As you will recall, he came to us with 10 cells. Now he has 350 cells. All the doctors at the HIV center where he undergoes systematic examination are shocked at the positive result they see in him. Normally they observe a decrease and struggle to prevent the decline in an attempt to somehow prolong the person's life. This is their only case of such positive results, when cells are stably increasing in number. This is a strong testimony. They present him as an example to other HIV-infected drug users. And from time to time someone will telephone and ask about rehabilitation.

In addition to maintenance matters, Maksim helps with the teen ministry. He knows how to relate. The teens love him. They call him on the phone. They joyfully listen to his reflections on the Scriptures. The Maksim of today—he's a fellow with a believing mother. She repented half a year ago, when she came to visit. Although she lives far away from us, she has gotten acquainted with many sisters of our church and constantly fellowships with them by telephone. One woman from our church reads the Bible with her by phone and prays with her each day. She wants to be baptized.

Friends, I carefully rejoice over such results. Rejoice with me, and pray for Maksim. He is still very vulnerable. But he loves the Lord and His church. About six months ago he experienced a little transgression—how he worried. How he regretted allowing sin into his life. I rarely see such among Christians.

From time to time as I look at Maksim, I recall the words of Christ, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save the perishing." This is what you and we are doing together now—saving the perishing.

Best wishes to you,  
Your brother and coworker,  
Vitaly Bilyak