



The Bilyaks

4th Quarter Report, 2019

October

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters!

As you know, my family and I have been involved in ministry in Ternopil since January 17, 2005. We moved to Ternopil from Dubno. We had a goal – to plant a new church that would be alive, growing, active, and would be directed to ministry right in the city and in the surrounding region.

During this time, the makeup of our family has changed. We came here, and we had a little daughter, Karina, who was just over one year old. In Ternopil our boys, David and Mark, were born. Karina and David are already in the youth group, and Mark is now 10. During this period of time, we have achieved a certain level of experience in ministry, but right up to the present time we are still getting to know God better and learning to serve.

Starting out in ministry was not simple. We began with nothing. Since the Baptist churches in Ternopil were small and relatively weak, we could not expect them to assist us with human or other resources. Therefore, we sought out sinners who themselves were seeking God. We took upon ourselves any ministry or function that would provide an opportunity to meet people and to tell them about God. From the very beginning we saw that the methods that work in Rovno or Dubno (where we came from) do not work in Ternopil. We had to resort to searching for other paths into people's hearts. We tried to locate those people with whom the Lord is working, people who were seeking God, and not to waste time on self-sufficient religious people.

The most effective and most church-building project has turned out to be the Bible group that has been studying the book of John. We started this after holding the holiday concert for the Day of the Bible. Over 20 people began visiting our group. There were people whom we had met before the Day of the Bible, but there were also new people. On April 14, 2006 the first 6 people from that group were baptized. That date is the birthdate of our church. Then there followed a second baptism of people from that group and from other ministries. Our people were so new and unaccustomed to church life, that when we began speaking with the first 6 about baptism, we had to show them photographs to explain what baptism is and how it's done. They feared that the pastor baptizing them might drown them. It was the same way with the Lord's Supper. Almost every element, action, and church practice had to be explained and justified from the Scripture.

Beginning as evangelists, we gradually became pastors, mentors, and counselors. Our people needed our attention. Time for evangelizing became less. Evangelism together with new brothers and sisters was not simple. Our baptisms took place less frequently, and with fewer people. Yet, almost every year we had new people who joined the church. I understood that we needed to invest in leaders, but where to find them? You and we have prayed about this from the beginning of our ministry. And the Lord answered our prayers. By the end of 2019, New Life

Baptist Church in Ternopil is a living church where the Lord is working. The church has a vision of faith that goes like this: “Thousands of people of Ternopil and the area who have turned to living faith in God through the ministry of the church; they have become dedicated followers of Jesus Christ.”

New Life Baptist Church in the city of Ternopil today

If we speak of the church as it is today, then it consists of active teams of diverse ministries, leaders, who are growing in understanding of the Lord and in ministries, a dynamic leadership of the church that takes responsibility for the church. Today nearly all members of the church are involved in the church’s ministries. The brothers of the church exhibit preparation to begin new projects/churches. I will write a brief summary, because if I were to write just a few sentences about each ministry, this letter would become too long.



- A functioning brotherly council made up of young ministers.
- Ordained ministers (pastor and deacon). A month ago the church set apart one brother to pastoral ministry and two brothers to the role of deacon.
- The young brothers are growing in their preaching, in leading worship services, and as ministry leaders. We have a schedule. The brothers preach once a month, or once every two months.
- Several home groups (youth, family, in the settlement Velikaya Beryozovitsa).
- Quality Sunday services with an live stream on Facebook.
- A praise group leads the church in worship in a worthwhile way.
- Weekly fellowship with tea after the worship service—this is an important factor in the church’s unity.
- A constantly functioning Wednesday Bible study. This is attended by those who don’t visit the house groups.
- Annual baptisms with a foundational preparation for membership and baptism.
- In the church we have counseling and mentoring. We have working T-groups (trust groups); each member of the church has a mentor/guardian. There are people who come for advice and help, or for premarital counseling.
- The ministry to those who are substance dependent. This is one of the church’s very first and most active ministries. It consists of a rehabilitation center for men in the nearby village of Zarubentsy, a Rehab Center Council, weekly evangelism in the pharmaceutical dispensary, ministry to the families of those undergoing rehab, and physical help for the church in many different ways.

- Social ministry. The church is known in the city as a place that helps. This has come about through the distribution of humanitarian aid and gifts of foodstuffs. Physical assistance has come through the abilities of the men in the rehab center. A search for resources (furniture, hygiene products) for poor people, collaboration with the Center of Social Ministries.
- The youth ministry is actively developing. Leaders are growing. The youth participate in the annual all-Ukraine summer project “Choose Life.”
- Children and teen ministries. These are 3 independent groups with teams. Weekly meetings. They hold various evangelistic and social projects (participation in various worship services, children’s outreach, and puppet theater).
- Annual projects. The family holiday, family camp, extreme youth camp, the “Choose Life” project. Such projects demand partner help. The church doesn’t have sufficient resources for the financing.
- Work in the boarding school in Novoye Selo, one of the new projects of the church in cooperation with the BIEM mission. No less than once per month a group of youth from the church serves 110 – 120 children in this boarding school.
- Evangelism through sports. A professional sportsman, Igor Sokolovsky, has joined the church. He works with trainers of the city and takes part in the social project “Open Training Camp,” where on Saturdays he is permitted to share publicly the Gospel for 100 – 150 people from the city.
- The church is undergoing education through the school “Following Christ.” This is a one-day Saturday event for the whole church that is held once every month or so.
- Training for the brothers. Men’s supper twice a month. Education for preachers. Individual brothers study in Christian seminaries, institutes...
- Thanks to the mission, the church has its own building, 70% completed. The parts that are available: the room for worship services, a smaller meeting room, kitchen, library, two Sunday school rooms. Guest rooms are almost finished. We need resources for the youth-sports zone.
- Right from the beginning the church finances have been disbursed in accord with the annually confirmed budget. The church fully pays its basic finances and regular ministry finances. Non-budget expenses are agreed on by the brotherly council. The church partially supports the minister of the rehabilitation center, Andrei Eliseev.

After such a description people typically ask how many people we have. The church currently has 31 members, but about 70 people attend our Sunday services. Most members of the church, in addition to working, are involved in various ministries for God in the church and outside its boundaries. Half of the members are active in three or more ministries. Unfortunately, we also have a second list—that is, people who were in the church, but who have gone over to Charismatic churches, or those who have been removed from the roll for sin.

We still have things to work on. From time to time we analyze our work and life, and in humility we seek answers from God in order to understand how to act in the future.

People love New Life Baptist Church due to its family feel, the coziness, and sincerity in relationships. We have prayed that the church would proceed to develop and to reach its vision of faith. Please pray for us and for the brothers and sisters who already work for the glory of God.

I have related all of this, not because we are so professional or so cool. Not at all. To the contrary, all this is possible despite our mistakes and failures, our incorrect decisions and doubts. In this story we all see the hand of our Almighty Lord, who has led us. We see that the words of Jesus Christ, “I will build my church” are still active, and He is building His church in Ternopil. Praise be to Him!

All of this is thanks to your support of our ministry. Thanks to prayers, offerings for our ministry and our projects. You are part of our team. The brothers and sisters of our church recognize this full well and understand. They, too, like our family, are thankful for your open hearts and open wallets.



Lastly, here are some of our most pressing needs for prayer. Please pray concerning:

- For people to repent and be baptized. There are people who have attended church for years, but who fear taking the step toward salvation and rebirth. There are others who have already repented and pray in church, and they even try to join certain ministries, but they constantly decline baptism.
- The brothers set apart for the ministry of pastor and deacons. That the time of the trial period will be a time of education and knowing God’s will.
- For finances for the summer projects (family camp, children’s camp, youth camp, the family holiday)
- For finances for the ministry of the rehabilitation center.

With best wishes and gratitude,
Your brother in Christ, Vitaly Bilyak

November

Hello, dear friends, brothers and sisters and coworkers of the BIEM mission!

In this letter I’d like to share a prayer request with you and also concerns about repentance, especially of some baptized people.

Right from the beginning of our ministry in Ternopil, we have baptized people nearly every year. Sometimes more, sometimes fewer. This matter is always in our sights. These are people whom we always need to work, as with new believers. Of course, from time to time there are people who join the church after moving to this city or after coming here from some other church, but that is



not at all the main goal for the life and ministry of the church. Our hope and constant prayer is for the salvation of sinners who are seeking God.

As you know, Ternopil is a very religious city. Here there are all kinds of people, ranging from those who are very religious and visit temples every Sunday to those who are atheists and agnostics. By the way, this last category is very popular among young students and the upperclassmen. We understand that no one comes to Jesus Christ unless he is called, unless the Father draws him. In other words, we're fully aware that the Lord is the one who does the saving, but our role in the process is to work in conjunction with God, who works in people's salvation.

There are a number of things to take note of in this matter. There are things that cause rejoicing, and there are things that bring upset. It is good news that quite a large number of unsaved people have visited our Sunday worship services and other functions outside of church. We have a tradition in the church that during Communion those who will participate in receiving the bread and the cup stand, and those who will not be receiving them remain seated. So, during Communion, from 1/3 to 1/2 of those in attendance will be seated. There are various reasons people do not participate. One may have drifted from the Lord. Another may be in a sin at that time, but such people are isolated examples. The majority of those who remain seated are those who have not repented or yet been baptized. This brings joy but is also disturbing. Joy, that such people are attending church, but disturbing in that many of them have already been attending worship services for an extended period of time, yet they hold back on the matter of salvation. About 70 people attend our Sunday services. Unsaved people sit in at youth meetings, home small groups, and the sports-fitness groups. We work with unsaved men at the Rehabilitation Center, and a group of brethren go to evangelize at the drug dispensary. And of course, many brothers and sisters engage in personal witnessing... Despite all of this, it seems to us that we aren't doing enough to reach new people for Christ. What especially concerns us is the people who have repented, but who haven't received baptism. And this is in an environment where teaching in the church about baptism is mentioned quite definitely and frequently.

I can't claim that I definitely know what is happening in the hearts and minds of these people, but I do know that several people don't get baptized because they don't family problems. They don't wish to spark a conflict. Some simply struggle with this matter. One married couple who said they wanted to get baptized and expressed their desire to prepare for baptism (by attending meetings in which we teach the foundations of the faith) were invited to join such a

group that would be preparing for baptism. But instead of following through, they said that they will wait and join a future group that will prepare for baptism. They continue visiting the church. By human reasoning, I understand their arguments, that they have 3 young children, with the youngest being only several months old. But in this matter there is something bigger going on than life's circumstances. The question lies in spiritual opposition, which people face the moment the subject of baptism is brought up.



Another example: Last summer we began a baptism-preparation group. An average of 5 people began attending it. In the end, one sole boy from the youth group was the only one in it. We planned on baptizing him alone, but in discussion with the brethren we understood that it would be better if he were to go through the baptism course one more time. We have great hopes for his future ministry in the church as a youth leader. We hope that a repeated preparation period will be a lesson for him concerning a more serious and zealous approach to the Scriptures. Because of that, we have not performed any baptism in 2019. A new group will now prepare for the baptism course. Four or five people will attend it. The couple I mentioned is planning to prepare for the group after this one. But my heart is heavy.

Please pray that the Lord will work with the people who are thinking about baptism. Concerning understanding God's will concerning the matters of repentance and baptism. Concerning baptism for people who have already been repented but who hold back from the decision to be baptized. Concerning courage and decisiveness for those who fear making known that they belong to a Baptist church. Concerning the group currently preparing for baptism. For the men in the Rehabilitation Center who are preparing for baptism.

Thank you for standing with us in support of this ministry.

Your brother and coworker in the work of the Gospel,

Vitaly Bilyak in Ternopil

December

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters, friends of the BIEM mission.

In this letter I'd like to share plans and needs connected with the youth and sports ministries.

As you know, right from the start, from the founding of the church we made work with youth and children a priority. We rejoice greatly when we can see results in the youth ministry. Our youth work in two directions. Personal witnessing outside the walls of the church, and also youth meetings held inside the church. I seem to recall sharing with you already that our youth are very concerned when they have a long period of meeting with unsaved youth in a neutral place, but then disappear, stop fellowshipping, when our youth invite them to read the Bible or come to church. Despite all that, around twenty young people come to our Friday evening youth meetings, where they play games, talk, sing, and in the end hear a sermon or take part in a discussion on an important topic and of course the Gospel.

Besides the youth ministry, in our church we also have a sports outreach. One part of that is a women's fitness group that the sisters of our church operate. In addition to the female members of our church, about 10 unsaved women and girls attend it. Besides the exercise time they also have a meeting, where they read the Scriptures and discuss things.

Also, we have a brother named Igor, who is a professional trainer in Greek-Roman wrestling. He works primarily "in the field." His primary target for ministry is other trainers. He, himself, was greatly influenced by his own trainer and understands that, in reaching fellow trainers with the Gospel, he can influence a whole generation of guys and girls. His meetings are more personal in gymnasiums and training halls, but from time to time he invites trainers to church for various meetings, and we rejoice when we see people coming to church wearing their sports gear. They sit and learn from the Bible.

You're probably already wondering why I have mentioned these three different groups in this letter. First, please pray for these 3 aspects of the ministry, that the Gospel will be easily understood and will prompt repentance, spiritual awakening, and lead to baptisms.

But there is another need, which unites all of these ministries. They all request that we complete the repair of the room designated for youth & sports in our building. In the basement of our building we have an exercise room and a foyer with restrooms, which need to be repaired. The youth have a dream for this room, that they will be able to set up a ping-pong table, foosball table, and classic exercise equipment where they can invite their friends simply to spend time. The sisters in the fitness group dream of having their sessions in the sports room, with ventilation, and not in the Sunday school room as they do now.

Igor and his trainers are waiting for this room as a place where trainers can meet in a sports setting, where they can not only sit at a desk but can also demonstrate some kind of techniques or rehabilitation exercises in case of sports trauma...

Please pray concerning the resources for completing the repair work of these locations. To prepare these rooms for the intended work will take from 7 to 10 thousand dollars.

With gratitude, and with greetings for Christmas, and the New Year of 2020

Your brother and
coworker,
Vitaly Bilyak

