



The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

1st Quarter Report, 2020

January

Dear friends, brothers and sisters and coworkers of the BIEM mission.

We thank you for your steadfast participation in our ministry. A special time in January was the evangelistic outreach to children and their families with the help of a puppet Christmas show. Here, there is a special emphasis on the Orthodox holiday called St. Nicholas day, which children greatly anticipate. On this day, parents give them gifts. For that reason, this is the favorite holiday of children. As it turns out, even Christmas is overshadowed by this other holiday. Even candy gift packs become cheaper around Christmas, because there's an emphasis on Nicholas, who supposedly slips candy under the pillows of children by night for this holiday. Each time we hold a Christmas event, we strive to reach a specific goal—to redirect children's thoughts away from Nicholas and onto the birth of Christ.

A puppet troupe from the "Tropinka" studio in Kyiv came to us with a Christmas show to perform. For several years already, during the Christmas season we hold evangelistic outreaches for the children of our city. This year the presentation was held on January 9. Usually that is considered pretty much part of the Christmas holiday time here (most people celebrate Christmas on January 7). Some people don't even need to work on that day. So, our Christmas holiday was quite successful.

A puppet presentation is a good evangelistic resource for unchurched people. In our region there is a very cautious—if not an openly hostile—attitude toward evangelistic churches. Such events are greatly needed because they can knock down these barriers. There are people who come who would never step across the threshold of the church on any other Sunday. The social service office for children and youth invited 75 children from the city. The other 75 children are kids invited by the brothers and sisters of our church, including the children who visit our children's meetings on Saturdays and Sundays. These were



two identical presentations shown at two separate times. Due to a massive outbreak of flu, around 20 kids who had been invited did not come, but all the rest enjoyed a wonderful time in the atmosphere of glad Christmas tidings.



Before the actual puppet show, leaders of our children's ministry conducted the first portion of our program—the play portion. They gave out prizes, sang songs, and invited the children to come to our Christian club.

In addition to evangelizing among the children, we used this opportunity to talk with parents, and the kids' grandparents. While the children were watching the show, some of the parents watched with them, but others made use of the chance to drink coffee in the smaller auditorium, and we were able to

simply chat with them there and establish relationships.

Please pray for the children's ministry of our church. At one time this was the most dynamic ministry, but in recent times it's become harder and harder to get children to our kids' meetings. It's tough to compete with the time they spend sitting at computers or on their smartphones. Only in cases where the parents understand this do we get children coming, but it's hard to expect such insight from parents who themselves do not go to church.

Pray for our leaders who work with the children, for their motivation and spiritual strength for ministry. Also pray for the opportunity to hold children's summer activities.

February

Peace be to you, dear friends of BIEM. During this unique time, God has appointed us to ministry. The world is changing, not day by day; it's hour by hour. But during all these chaotic changes and innovations, His church remains a foundation of support. More than that, you and we have a direct impact on her structure and growth. The opportunity to labor alongside God in the establishment of His Church is an amazing and unique opportunity and honor. From time to time I reflect on this, and it gives me strength to press forward and to overcome difficulties. With these words, I hope to encourage you. I know that it's not simple for you to remain faithful to your calling and to ministry. I'd like to encourage you with the words of the Apostle Paul, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

In this letter I want to share one of the facets of the church's ministry. The men of our church have a tradition. At the end of each year, we drive to the mountains to spend time in prayer, reading the Scriptures, reflection on the life of the church, and we lay some specific plans. Looking at the life of the church, we decided that we should make 2020 a "year of evangelism." This doesn't mean that we didn't evangelize previously. We simply understood that we ought to do more in this area.

Naming a year doesn't mean our plans will work out. We've noticed that in our time, personal evangelism is the type that works best. We decided to offer our church people a plan for how to be involved in personal evangelism. Of course, as always there are those who make use of advice, and those who won't. But we believe that, if people talk about it, this will prompt actions.

So, the first thing we did was to have everyone pray for the Lord to show us which ones of all the people around us should be "candidates for evangelism." This should be unsaved friends, relatives, coworkers and neighbors. We were to write down prayerfully 5 people whom the Lord would show us.

Second, continuing in prayer, we should try more to fellowship with these people, to try to help them if they have any sort of need, to serve them and to share the Gospel, and even better, to earn the right to begin a Bible study with them.

The end goal of this plan is to lead people to repentance and to help them become evangelists among their own circles of acquaintances.

This would seem to be a simple plan, but at the same time it's complicated. Even at the first stage it wasn't easy for me to select 5 people. There are various people I know, acquaintances, unbelievers, but with some of those I've already tried to share about God. Some respond with hostility; others are ready to talk, just not about Christ. Please pray for each person in our church to get involved in personal evangelism.

Also pray for all our evangelistic outreaches. For the work with orphans in the boarding school, youth evangelism, the sports ministry, the children's and teen ministry, the work with those who have addictions and their families, the evangelistic summer camps for children and youth and families...

Thank you for standing with us, so that together we can serve for the establishment of God's Church.



March

Hello, dear brothers and sisters, coworkers and partners with the BIEM ministry.

The church is in quarantine. Who would have thought that such a thing is possible? But this is the reality in which we live. Have we ceased to be the church? Of course not. But all of this is a huge summons for each church.

I've noticed that it's easier for young churches such as ours to adapt to the new reality; for older churches in Ukraine, it's more difficult. Researchers claim that 20% - 30% of people

will not go back to church after the quarantine. I think that depends on whether people felt connected to each other during the isolation.

The same with the whole world – the quarantine came upon us unexpectedly. We had prepared to have a baptism in the church. Two of our brothers are ready for baptism. These are Ruslan from the youth group and Vladimir from the Rehabilitation Center. The original date was set for March 29, and then moved to April 12. Now we're simply waiting with no date for the quarantine to be lifted.

Big churches felt the discomfort of the first Sunday of quarantine more than small churches. It was forbidden to gather in groups larger than 100 people. This didn't affect us; we normally have about 70 people at services. Next there followed laws forbidding gathering in groups greater than 10 people. We adapted quickly. We organized 4 groups of 10 people and for the next three Sundays we held worship services in these groups. In each group there was time for worship, and then we listened to broadcasts of our sermons over Facebook. In this way, we felt ourselves united.



Our weekdays meetings have switched to a video-conference format. We have continued our leadership studies on Mondays. The home groups also continue through video connections. Our youth even play games through such video

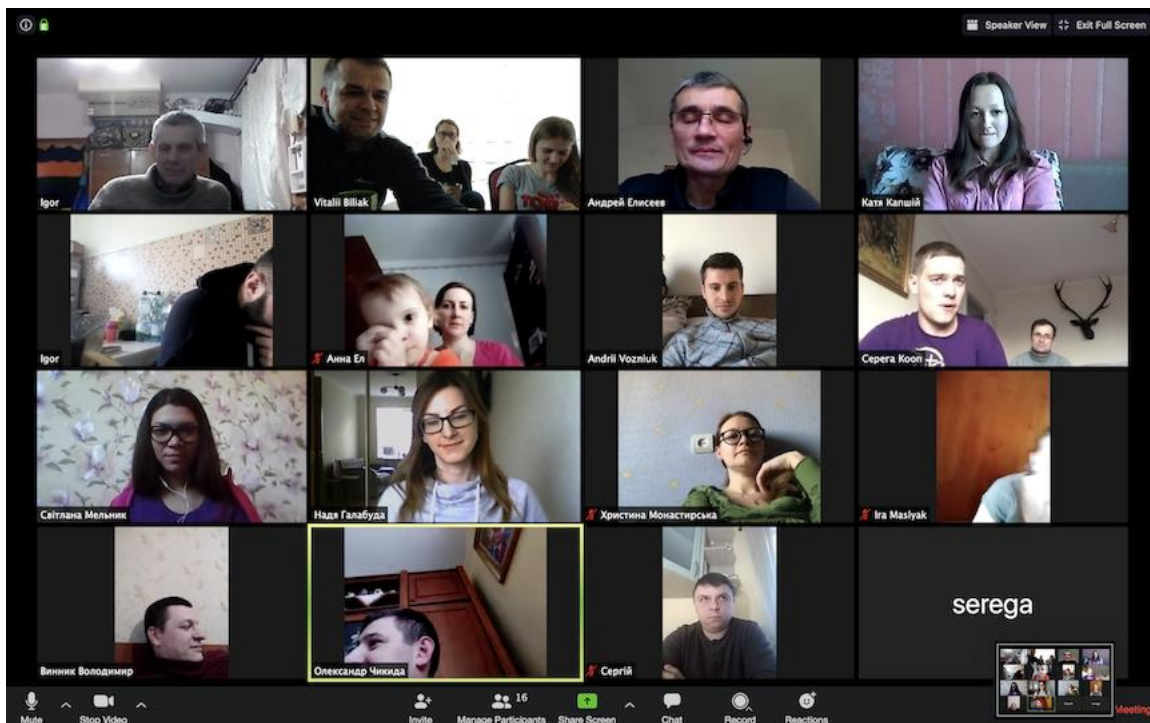
conferences. Each Wednesday evening, we hold a Zoom conference for the whole church. This is a very precious 2 hours of fellowship, prayer, and study of the Scriptures. Near their computers, tablets, and telephones are families and married couples. It's very special to see each other, to look in each other's eyes, to hear the excitement in their voices. One of our people even thanked God that the pandemic occurred during a time when technology has enabled us not only to hear each other but also to see each other.

For me as pastor, such all-church gatherings are very precious. After them, I call around to those who weren't able to join us. In the end, someone needs help with groceries; another needs drinking water; and others need someone to pray with and to be encouraged.

In general, people are more or less making do with the new quarantine circumstances. It's hard for families that have small apartments and young children. They have no opportunity to get out of the home. The parents must take upon themselves the role of teachers. Due to this, some parents develop a case of "nerves." A few married couples suffer from a crisis of being in close quarters together for long periods of time; others have lost their work. It's hard on those who constantly read the news... But there are some who enjoy the quarantine. Introverts who don't have little children running around the house are even quite content.

Separately, I wish to thank the BIEM mission for a laptop computer for broadcasting. I had requested it in order to improve the quality of broadcasts for our services, which we can promote among our unsaved relatives, neighbors, and friends. This turned out to be a very timely blessing. For the past two Sundays we've used this laptop for broadcasting our services. This is a new level for us. Previously we used my smartphone and the quality was very low. Now we have good sound. We're all still learning how to make a good video, but even for temporary measures, this helps. Of course, this is very precious for our brothers and sisters, who must stay at home, but by statistics I see that about 20% of our viewers are unbelievers. One of our acquaintances who is going through a difficult period in life due to oncological illness watches us constantly.

Please pray that, despite the isolation, we can be salt and light for this frightened, deceived world that is locked up in their own rooms.



Thank you for your active participation in our ministries.

Your brother and coworker,
Vitaly Bilyak