



The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

3rd Quarter Report, 2023

July

I greet you, brothers and sisters, friends, and workers of the BIEM mission. Every month when it's time for another letter, I want to share something special, some kind of blessing. Although our life under wartime conditions is very complicated, I catch myself thinking of how I want to talk about blessings rather than about misfortunes, losses, and problems. Now, there is so much evil and negativity that somehow, intuitively, you don't want to think about it one more time, let alone write about it. You hear enough bad news in the mass media. But the Gospel, after all, is "Good News"! Praise God, there is something to write about, to share good news and blessings.

Today I want to talk about one very blessed moment in the life of our church. When we first started planting our church, it seemed to me that the goal of the ministry would be a large, crowded church. But time, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and experience in ministry have changed my opinion about the success of the church. Now I see success, not in increasing the number of people in one church, but in sufficient maturity of the church to give birth, to establish new, healthy, local churches. This does not mean at all that the church cannot and should not grow numerically.

We noticed that the bigger the church becomes, the more people try to occupy the back pews. Their Christian life is reduced to attending Sunday services. However, my understanding from experience is that every person in the church can and should be useful in the ministry. In our church, almost everyone is looking for an opportunity to serve. So, we saw that the church was ready to establish a new church. As a team of leaders, we were ready. Unfortunately, this is not enough if you do not have people whom the Lord has called for this ministry. Therefore, it is a two-way process. Everything went surprisingly well.

Our son-in-law Sergiy and daughter Karina turned out to be the people whom the Lord called to this ministry of church planting. It was a difficult decision for them. They would be starting a church during a war—not the best time, if you look at it from a human perspective. But they went for it. Moreover, they became missionaries under our BIEM mission.

They have been engaged in this ministry for some time. They chose for themselves a district in our city with the wonderful and positive name of "Friendship." There are no other Baptist churches there, but it is a large area with two huge universities (academic and economic). Because of the war, there are many refugees in our city, and most of them live there.

When they made the final decision and gathered a minimum team for this ministry, our church blessed them with prayer and finances.

On July 9, 2023, we took another important step to start a new church—we ordained Sergiy as a missionary pastor for this church. A few additional preachers came for this service. I represented our church, and the prayer was performed by Igor Levtseniuk, from the Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches. He is also the pastor of my mother (home) church “Bethany” (in Dubno), which at the time blessed me for ministry. The third pastor was Yuri Senchenko, Sergiy’s friend and mentor.



Each of us expressed a wish for Sergiy, Karina, and the church. Then we performed a prayer of consecration with the laying on of hands. After the solemn official service, we held a celebration dinner for the whole church, and everyone who had a desire expressed their best wishes to Sergiy and Karina.

This was another important moment in the direction of the birth of a new church because churches must give birth to churches.

There are already two sisters who have turned to the Lord through Sergiy and Karina’s ministry. They are refugees. They repented and were baptized in early August.

Friends, pray for this special project of organizing a new church. Pray for Sergiy, Karina, and my granddaughter Karolina, who is only 3 months old.

Pray for the team of our mother church, that when the time comes to send some people to the new church, our congregation will not be discouraged because of the reduction in numbers, but on the contrary will feel the opportunity for growth and attracting new people for the gospel and discipleship.

Pray for new people for the team forming the new church.

With best wishes and blessings,
Your brother and colleague,
Vitaly Bilyak

August

Greetings, friends, staff of the BIEM mission.

With this letter I want to thank you for your support of the camp ministry in Ukraine. Friends, thank you for your prayers and for the funds for the camps.



Summer is the time when most churches are involved in camp ministry. Last year was more difficult in this regard, but this year, it seems we have learned to live during war and continue ministering to others despite the war.

One of the brightest camps this summer was the Extreme Camp for Christian youth. It was held in the Carpathian Mountains.

Although we worked according to our previous plan, this year everything seemed almost like the first time since last year we did not hold any away camps, many aspects had to be structured in a new way.

Sergiy Koop was responsible for this camp and its preparation. We decided to hold this youth camp in two teams: One team would be the youth of our church; the other team would be youth from the new church-planting ministry, which my son-in-law Sergiy and my daughter Karina oversee. The team was preparing for the program, the youth were expecting a rest, and we were preparing all the supplies for the camp. Because almost all the camp equipment had been used to receive refugees, everything had to be rewashed. To prepare the basic campsite we recruited the men from the rehabilitation center. But even so, none of them knew how everything should be done, how to put things together... So, I had to oversee the processes. When we had expressed doubts about holding camps during the war, our brothers who serve in the army said, “Go ahead and hold the camps for youth and children. Let them form memories of not being abandoned during the war, of you serving them and caring about them. Let them have memories so that they remember more than just bad things during the war.”

In total, about 40 people came to that camp. We expected a larger number; the registration went according to plan, and we had enough people. But at the last moment some parents decided not to let their young people go out of fear. The fact is, there are no safe regions in Ukraine. Yes, in the west it’s a little safer than on the front line, but missiles and drones fly everywhere and hit targets all over the country.

This camp, this vacation, this ministry was different from many previous camps. Although we held this camp to distract young people a little from the war and from hard news, this part of the goal seems to have failed. Even though the team gave their all to create the most positive, cheerful atmosphere possible, it didn’t work out very well. Those who attended our previous camps noticed this very much. For example, a trampoline that in the past had always been fun, noisy, and busy remained practically deserted or someone used it just to sleep on even though this year we had a wonderful, new, and larger trampoline. Rafting, the highlight of past camps, has always been in such demand that we had to limit those who could raft down the mountain river on catamarans. This time everything was different. On the first day, everyone swam once, and on the second day so few signed up for rafting that we canceled that trip. even though the water was excellent for rafting. In past years, even with much lower water levels, young people took part in rafting with pleasure. Many games with physical activity were sluggish. The music that usually filled the air around the camp seemed out of place this year. When there was any music at all, it was sung in a low voice, like a distant background, reminiscent of past fun times.

Fortunately, the trip to the mountains was a success, albeit with some adventures and changes in the route. The feeling of wartime did not leave during the entire camp. Many young campers had close relatives in the war. Some had lost loved ones...But the good news is that the Gospel gives hope. The Word of God encouraged and found a response in the hearts of young people. Reading Scripture in the tents, and in the evening fellowship around the fire, and in personal conversations between the leaders and the campers— all this instilled hope. Young brethren shared testimonies and preached the

gospel message. Praise the Lord, His Word is working in the hearts of young people who have heard the Gospel.

Please pray for the young people who heard the words of the Gospel. A certain part of our youth came to God precisely through camping ministry. May the Lord continue His work in their hearts. Pray please for the youth ministry teams in our church and in the new church we are working to build.

With best wishes of grace and goodness,
Your brother,
Vitaly Bilyak from Ternopil

September

Dear brothers and sisters associated with the BIEM mission.

In this letter I want to share with you two testimonies about two camps that took place this summer, in addition to the one I wrote about in my previous letter.

At the beginning of the summer, we held a camp for teens. It was a new experience for us. There were about 40 people in the camp. I did not have the opportunity to visit this camp because I was serving on the front line during this period.

Here is a story from Irina, a leader of the teen ministry:

Teen Tent Camp “Back to Reality”

This camp was held over three days with teenagers who had already attended a teen or kids club for a year. Only a small number of teens were in the camp for the first time, having never attended a teen club before. In the camp there were two people (a brother and sister) who had lost their parents and were being raised by their grandmother, as well as 3 more kids from low-income families. Such children are more difficult to work with, and they need even more love and support from leaders to accept the fact that Christ loves them.

The theme of the camp was for teens to return virtual reality to real life. We talked and shared testimonies about how God can and does free us from addiction to social networks and computer games.

Of course, the Gospel and Good News about Christ and His sacrifice was presented. Many teens on their lives during this topic, and it was clear that theme struck a chord with the children.

After the camp we received feedback from one The eldest son, who attended the camp after the testimony of one of the leaders about liberation from addiction to computer games, independently decided to stop playing games. The mom says that before the camp, Artem could play games for 4-6 hours a day, but after the camp he did not sit down at the computer at all.



*from
personal*

*Jesus
reflected
this*

family.



Also, from the group of older girls, 2 girls decided to join and help in another camp that our church was holding at the end of the summer. Marichka and Violetta were assistants and had the opportunity to see and join God's work. Now Marichka has agreed to be an assistant in the teen team and actively attends a home teenage Bible study group.

More kids continue to attend teen club meetings, and many have started attending a home group. The camp was a good opportunity to make more friends with these kids, to spend these few days with them, to tell personal testimonies, and tell them about God.

The most valuable time was when each group and its leader read the Word of God in the morning. The kids were able to ponder, ask questions, and study the Bible.

So, this camp was a great and blessed time!

The last, final project of this summer was a day camp on the school grounds near the church. Andrey, the head of the children's ministry in the church, oversaw this camp. Here is his short testimony:

A particularly blessed time at camp was when the children learned more about the Lord through the pages of the Bible. The children listened with pleasure, took part in the discussion of stories, and always actively answered questions. It was clear that the children distinguished between good and evil and empathized with the heroes who made a choice in favor of God.

Each story motivated the children to make friends with God and be obedient to Him and learn to pray. I know of cases where children told stories to their friends and family. I was especially struck by the story that one grandmother shared, how her granddaughter always told her papa a Bible story at home, and this child's father was a priest of the Orthodox Church.

Parents often came with younger children, so they also became participants and had the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

Also, every day, almost all the children looked forward to reciting a Bible verse that confirmed and recalled God's truth from the previous story. I believe that the Word of God will "grow and bear abundant fruit" in the lives of these children.

The children also actively participated in sports games and actively spent time with the leaders, which contributed to the formation of friendships between children and leaders. There was a sense of trust and a pleasant atmosphere. We enthusiastically made various items (crafts) with our own hands, some for ourselves, and some for our mother, sister, or brother. God blessed the camp, and some of the children began attending children's services.

Friends, please pray for the children and adolescents with whom our church leaders work, that the Word of Christ will change the lives of these children, as well as their families. Please pray for the leaders, for their spiritual strength and exemplary lives for preaching the Gospel.

With best regards, your brother,
Vitaly Bilyak in Ternopil