



# BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

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## “Thanks a Million!” — With Your Help, We’ve Reached an Amazing Milestone!

**W**hen war broke out in Ukraine, Russian artillery and missiles began exploding homes, bridges, vehicles... Souls were being blasted into eternity. People fled for their lives, taking few possessions. Nobody could foresee how long the fighting would last, but one thing BIEM saw plainly was that the victims needed both spiritual and physical aid—*ASAP*.

BIEM quickly regared our website and called on you, our friends and supporters, to help Ukrainians caught in the crossfire (especially believers, Galatians 6:10). By creating a War Relief Fund, we provided a trustworthy channel through which concerned Christians could meet serious needs, all to the glory of God. And you responded!

**As of mid-February, BIEM has distributed one million dollars in war relief!**



Here, church members in Smolin distribute basic foodstuffs to local villagers. In such circumstances, what must unbelievers like this young girl think about believers?

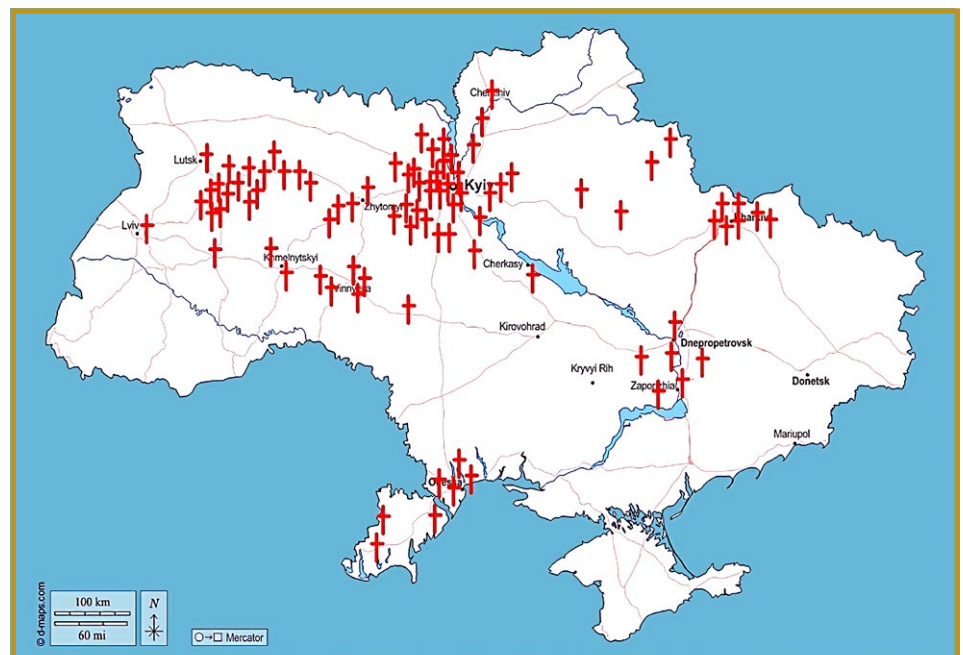
As funds have become available, we have distributed them to churches in Ukraine that were receiving and assisting war refugees. Over 100 such Ukrainian churches have received war relief aid from BIEM, which greatly exceeded the actual number of churches planted by BIEM. In fact, it includes most of the churches that comprise the Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches of Ukraine, with whom we have strong ties. (See map.)

Your gifts for war relief have blessed tens of thousands of Ukrainians who found themselves in pitiable circumstances due to the war. Even more exciting, these recipients didn’t receive just material aid. They heard the Gospel. Plus, if they didn’t own a personal Bible or New Testament and wanted one, they received one. The

best news is that these two-pronged efforts have reaped an abundant harvest of souls. So much so that, even though our churches lost many members who exited Ukraine, the number of unbelievers who came looking for hope and then trusted Christ have replenished congregations. In some cases, despite departed members, church services are fuller now than before the war!

What specific form does war relief take? A huge need has been food. Churches have used BIEM funds to provide meals for refugees who arrived with few provisions. In addition to food, host churches have purchased bedding, medicines, medical supplies, hygienic products, coal and wood for the increased need to heat their buildings, plus miscellaneous articles

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Although BIEM can’t reach congregations in occupied areas, your aid has benefited most others in the Brotherhood of Independent Baptist Churches.

## A Tearful Trip to the Front

*In Ukraine, BIEM missionary Bruce Tuttle and others traveled to the frontlines to share the Gospel and aid. These excerpts will help you to imagine the conditions.*

We left early on a Thursday morning. Three trucks had departed earlier, loaded with humanitarian supplies from our Baptist churches in Bila Tserkva (but ultimately from you all). One carried building supplies to repair damaged homes and church buildings, but most of the load was food. In addition, three large vans carried humanitarian aid plus fifteen of us, intent on ministering there.

As we approached the area of conflict, ambulances were coming from that direction. We stopped and put on bulletproof vests—not so much protection against bullets as against shrapnel.

We spent most of Friday morning at a church where potatoes were doled out to people. That afternoon my group took two of those vans loaded with food, candles,



*Kupiansk: "Day and night, intermittently, we heard the boom of Ukrainian cannons lofting artillery shells over us and toward the Russians. We also heard the crash of explosions from Russian artillery that had fired over us from the other direction."*

and matches. The day was bitterly cold as we traveled down village roads. Where people were still living, they would come to the roadside. We would stop, jump out, and hand them each a box of supplies, including a couple candles and a few boxes of matches. They were so eager to receive them.

The villages were the scene of much destruction, partly from the battle when the Russian army came to occupy the area, and then from when the Ukrainian army returned to drive them out.

One of the worst scenes of destruction was at the intersection of two streets in a village. There, Ukrainian and Russian tanks had battled. Buildings suffered widespread damage. Every fence and gate was riddled with bullet holes. The walls of houses were broken or demolished. Many roofs were caved in or gone. Most window frames no longer had glass. A few residents who remained had covered

their window frames with plastic sheeting. Still, I wondered how much heat those homes could retain.... Residents have no electricity; they live in darkness for hours. Firewood is scarce, but people don't go

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*Doling out potatoes: "The number of potatoes given to each person was relative to how many people are in their household."*

*"In addition to food, we took a partial truckload of OSB wood sheets and corrugated asbestos-cement roofing panels. These provided for roofing repairs for churches and homes."*



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*"Reaching the world for Christ since 1981"*

Dr. Peter Slobodian, Founder

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**...Trip to the Front** *continued from page 2*  
 into the forest because of mines planted by the retreating Russians. No food shops remain. Public transportation in the city is long gone. Locals live in desperation with no money, no jobs, and no groceries.

As we handed out food, the responses of many were pitiful. Two older women broke into tears to receive a box that might last them a week, maybe two if they were careful, with only a couple of candles for their darkness. They cried and thanked us. An older man stepped out of a house with no roof, no windows, and a collapsed wall. He came to receive a carton of food. I did my best to hold back tears, wondering how anyone could survive in such a house!

On Saturday, I joined others going to conduct children's ministry at a church

in Kupiansk. The Russians had occupied Kupiansk before being driven out. I spent the day taking photos and talking to children. The members of that church hadn't expected more than a handful of children. They were surprised when fifty-five came. The children heard and sang Gospel songs. They played games and then heard Bible stories and the Gospel.

On Sunday, the church filled to overflowing! Most were unbelievers who came merely to receive humanitarian supplies at the conclusion of the sermon. However, they seemed to listen attentively. Pastor Igor and I preached. When the elderly pastor gave an invitation, one woman came forward weeping and wanting to repent and come to Christ. Her children and husband were all killed in one day.

The elderly pastor has two adult daughters. One was married to a man who had become the pastor of that church when the elderly pastor stepped down. But during the Russian occupation that younger pastor was shot and killed. His widow, Oksana, brought her three children (Mark, 22; Anton, 19; and Alina, 16) to the evening meal in the older pastor's home. They are impressive young people, much engaged with children's ministry and wonderfully respectful to their mother and grandparents.

Please don't shut your heart of compassion for these people who remain in great distress! Please continue to pray fervently. If you can help in material ways, please do. ■



*"Sometimes walls remained, but the roofs had caved in."*



*Occasionally, the elements reveal lethal mines, but not always.*

**...Thanks a Million** *continued from page 1*  
 as needs arose. Some of these churches sustained damage from artillery or bombs, and in such cases our aid assisted them in making repairs.

Furthermore, BIEM's war relief efforts included evacuating many Ukrainians—mostly women and children—from areas under attack. While most were evacuated to Western Ukraine, many were also evacuated to Poland, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States. No doubt, many lives were saved through these evacuations.

However, Ukrainian believers have also been proactive in traveling to "hot" zones along the battlefield to deliver packages containing such items as New Testaments, groceries, candles, matches,

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*"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).  
 Shown preaching: BIEM missionary Vitaly Bilyak.*

## A Man Named Nur



*Although Ukraine is a particular concern, BIEM remains active in Russia, Belarus, Georgia, and other lands. In Central Asia, an outreach we call Greater Mercy Mission involves twenty national pastors and workers in five countries. In ten years, they have started over fifty house churches and distributed thousands of Gospel tracts, evangelistic videos, and MP3 New Testaments. We now have a women's shelter, a deaf ministry, and summer camps. Recently, God helped us to develop an Afghan refugee outreach, including a school for children and a Bible Institute for Afghans! All this takes place in Muslim countries. We believe there have been over 5,000 professions of faith in Jesus Christ since we began. Here's the story of one refugee from Afghanistan...*

“My name is Nur. I heard the saving message of Jesus from a Tajik who invited me to a Christian meeting. At first, I was suspicious of these Christians, but I was also curious about how they pray and worship God. A Tajik brother shared about how Jesus spent His infancy as a refugee in Egypt after being persecuted in His hometown, and He understands what Afghans are going through. He read from *Injil* [the New Testament] Jesus' words, which said, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

“I had never met Christians before and didn't know what they believed. Hearing these words, my world turned upside down. As I remember from childhood until now, my family always lived in fear and sought for a safe place. I remembered my whole life: my family

was always on the run as refugees without a homeland and country. I had asked Allah with tears in my eyes during my prayers to show compassion to my family but instead received silence and more hardships. My father and brother were brutally killed by the Taliban, who claimed loudly that they will bring God's Sharia and act justly, but instead we got more Evil masters, destroying everyone, everything I loved.

**...Thanks a Million** continued from page 3

warm socks and gloves, and occasionally items like sleeping bags to those with nowhere else to go. In towns and villages where the only stores have been destroyed or looted by invasion forces, such gifts are gratefully accepted as a godsend.

In addition, because Ukrainian church members have so many husbands, fathers, and brothers who have been conscripted into military service, those contacts provide access for delivering Gospels and humanitarian to military units along the frontlines. While there, our personnel also aid civilians in those same dangerous areas.

At the onset of winter, when Russian missiles and drones began targeting Ukraine's power grid, electrical outages affected huge swaths of the country. Temperatures inside homes and churches dropped amid the realization, “They're trying to freeze us!” To counter that sudden emergency, BIEM expended about \$250,000 dollars on generators, with churches being first to receive them. In this way, churches provided “warming centers” where anyone needing a haven from frigid temps could go to warm up, recharge cell phones, and talk with the believers staffing those sites.

In English, the phrase “Thanks a million” is a shortening of “Thank you a million times” for occasions of extreme

“When I heard the message of these Tajiks, something in my heart broke, and my eyes filled with tears. I went to the brothers and prayed, accepting Jesus into my heart as my Savior, my Lord, and Someone who gives rest to my weary soul. I came home that night and shared with my poor wife, who faithfully went with me through these hardships. She knelt down that cold night saying, ‘Except for you, I have no one. What you believe, I believe. Where you go, I go!’ So, she accepted Jesus as her Savior and Lord. We have one son and two daughters who also enjoy reading *Injil*, and now we support one another. For almost one month now we have given our lives to the Lord, who loves our soul and gives us rest!” ■



*About \$250,000 provided generators for vital heat and lights during power outages.*

gratitude. But in these circumstances, please allow us at BIEM to sincerely say both, “Thanks a million” and “Thanks for the million”!

*We pray for the end of this war, but while it continues, we will continue to follow the example of Christ. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10) but also responded with compassion for the multitudes when they were sick and hungry. To view brief videos of Ukrainian*



*believers assisting with aid, visit the Home page of [BaptistInternational.org](http://BaptistInternational.org) and click the link View Video Updates.* ■