



## **The Petrenkos in Goncharovsk & Smolin, Ukraine**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Report, 2022**

#### **January**

Greetings to you, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ!

So, the first month of the new year is already behind us, and it has been fruitful for us. In Ukraine, we celebrate Christmas twice, both in December and in January. We use this holiday to tell people about the birth of Jesus Christ! We also gave gifts to children, which made them very glad. Praise God that we have such an opportunity to give people the very most important gift—telling them about the Good News of the Savior.

Also in Ukraine, there is a holiday is dedicated to the baptism of Jesus Christ, and on this holiday there's this idea that each person should dip in water three times and thus be cleansed from sin and add health. ☺ For this holiday, Vanya (the mayor of Smolin) and Vitaly Nikolaevich (the mayor of Goncharovsk) invited Ira and me to a nature spot where there is a river. Vitaly Nikolaevich suggested that I jump into the river, but then he said, "Oh, that's right; you don't support this tradition. In that case just spend time talking with us." On the drive there, we had a chance to talk with Vanya and his wife about this holiday and about how only Jesus can forgive sins and about how much of our culture is derived from heathen practices. We enjoyed a nice time and had an opportunity to share the truth. It's interesting that Vanya and his wife don't let anyone get close them in personal life, but they want to fellowship with us. Our request is that you pray for this family and that God will help us to speak of Him always and to everyone.

Also this month, they held a regional voice competition, in which our eldest daughter Rima competed. She sang two songs at this competition, and a while later the results were announced—for one song she took 1<sup>st</sup> place, and for the other she received 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Praise the Lord for that!

During this time, work continued on finishing the ceiling of the church building's second floor. With each completed phase of construction, we thank the Lord and you that you participate with us in such a project for the Lord.

Around here, people often speak about war, and it's not just people's conversation. The news is full of information and about the possibility of invasion by Russian troops and large-scale war. People are very anxious about this information, and there are even instructions for the

evacuation of wives and children of soldiers. People now have many fears and panic connected with the war and concerns of what to do in case of war. During these uneasy times, we can speak to people about Christ and about how God can give calmness in any situation.

Please pray about the following needs:

1. That God will use us further for bringing the Truth to people.
2. For the family of Vanya and Zhenya and that we will be able to spend more time with them.
3. That God will give peace in our country and will keep us from war.
4. That the construction of the church building will continue.

So, that is all that we wanted to share with you, dear friends and coworkers in the Lord!

Sasha Petrenko

## **February**

Greetings dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ!

This month was like a nightmare for every Ukrainian.

On February 24 at 6:30 am, there was a very loud explosion that woke up almost our entire town. I ran out to the balcony and saw how many military men ran to their units on alert. Within 5 minutes we gathered our daughters and ran outside. It was the first rocket that flew into our town, which meant that a full-scale war had begun in Ukraine! I decided we would go to the church in Smolin, and I took with me those who wanted to leave.

On the first day, there were 40 people with me in the prayer house, among them were non-believers, who were very afraid of bombing and death. From the first days, I understood that soon there would be a rush on the stores and soon people would starve. Prices would skyrocket. So, I went to the store and bought a large supply of food so that we could last as long as possible. With many thanks to the BIEM mission for financial assistance, we were able to survive thanks to God and you.

The event in Ukraine developed very quickly, and our army began to fight with the Russian army. On the first day, I lost two military acquaintances who came under artillery fire. Also, I got a call from my older brother, who was at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. He told me that he was a prisoner of the Russians. He is still in their captivity today. From the first days of the war, I told everyone present that our hope is in God and not in walls or shelters. We lived together those days. I can say with confidence that in all my Christian life I have not experienced such an awareness of

the presence of God as in those days. We gathered for prayer every hour, and if there was shelling, we did not get up from our knees until the shelling ended. We also held church services three times a day. People were open to listening to the Word of God and accepted what was written there.

It so happened that Ira and our youngest daughter were in western Ukraine. I had stayed at home with my two daughters. I didn't manage to leave Goncharovsk on the first day, and when the roads were blocked, I asked God the question, "Why did you leave me here?" And in the first Sunday service, I spoke about Christ, and about the fact that every person needs to be reconciled with the Lord. And then I called for repentance and asked if there was anyone in the building who would like to repent. People began to raise their hands and to cry. We prayed together, wept together, and we thanked God for adding these saved ones to the church. This price was high, but praise be to God that through such circumstances people began coming to God. Those who previously did not want to hear anything about God or the church were suddenly living in the church!

Also, Mayor Vitaly Nikolaevich came to us every evening. He brought food and prayed with us for God's protection and peace. Praise be to God for His care and His protection!

Please pray for:

- 1) About the world.
- 2) That God be our hope.
- 3) Those who have lost loved ones.
- 4) That we should not be silent about Christ.
- 5) My brother, that God will free him from Russian captivity.

Thank you for supporting us during this difficult time!

The Petrenkos

### **March**

Greetings, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ!

God is good, and God is our help and protection!

This March was a turning point for us. Let me remind you that I was in the church in Smolin, and there were about 40 people with me. We were cut off from civilization and could not leave. Early on, I understood that there would come a time when we might have to try to break out to a safer place. I prayed to God and asked for three things: first, that He provide a safe corridor; second, that there be people who wanted to leave with me; and third, that when I saw shells falling

very close, that would be a sign that we need to leave. On March 13, after the Sunday service, I drove some documents to Goncharovsk. I went to our home, stayed there for 20 minutes, and then we headed to church. As soon as we arrived, I heard explosions and instructed everyone to head to the church as something was about to happen, to which they replied that those things happen every day ....

We entered the church for prayer, and the sisters asked Vitalik and me to carry two boxes of food to the cellar. We had time only to put them on the floor in the cellar when heavy shelling began. I shouted to Vitalik to climb the steps from the cellar, because if a shell hit the cellar, we would be buried with earth. We prayed very hard and heard how the children and women in the church were crying and praying. My prayer was that the shells would not explode and do us harm, and secondly, that if one hit us that we immediately go to the Lord, since there was no hospital. The wounded are a very big problem. The first shelling ended.

I had just stepped outside when even more intensive shelling began. The earth trembled, the church shook. Car windows and the church windows were damaged from shaking. Thank God, everyone remained alive and well! When I went back inside, people in the church stared at me like I was a ghost. They had assumed I must be dead. After the shelling, we walked down the street and saw that many shells were in the asphalt and in the ground did not explode and harm people.

I called Goncharovsk and friends told me Goncharovsk was heavily shelled and the Russians hit the garden, which is near our house, the boiler house and the water canal and the unit. Two fragments flew into our apartment, one broke the window and damaged the sofa, and the other hit the air conditioner. Thank God, we were in the church at that moment!

After that, I asked whether anyone would like to evacuate? Those who wanted to leave immediately raised their hands. We prayed and decided that if we live to see the dawn, we would leave for western Ukraine, where my Ira and children were. I asked to be taken out by a secret road for the military. There were 3 cars full of people who decided to try to leave, although the military told us that we would not be able to leave, as there was shelling. But God kept us and we drove on a very bad road through the forest. As we were driving, we saw shells exploding, but they did not reach us. It was the most difficult road in my life. With God's help, we overcame it. We arrived in Zdolbuniv, to the house of Irina's parents. There were 24 refugees there. This house became our temporary shelter.

After we had been there for a week, people appeared who wanted to leave Ukraine. Ira and I drove people to Poland, and also our children for 1 month. Since they had been under shelling, they needed to take a break from constant anxiety and explosions. Some went further to Holland, Germany, or Belgium. Ira and I decided that we would travel and carry humanitarian aid and tell people about Christ.

This is how we spent this month.

Pray for these needs:

- 1) For my older brother who is a prisoner of the Russians.
- 2) For peace to come soon.
- 3) For those places in which there is shelling.
- 4) For refugees.
- 5) That we can testify to people about Christ in this difficult time.

Thank you for being with us at this difficult time for our country. We feel your financial and prayer support.

Sasha Petrenko