



BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

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Church Planting in Smolin

What is a terrific goal for every church plant? Sure, immediate goals are to win souls for Christ, baptize them, and to disciple them using Scripture. However, instead of placing all the focus on that new congregation, the long view anticipates a blessed day when that young church can establish yet another church in a needy area.

Over the years, BIEM has repeatedly praised God when churches we planted “gave birth” to daughter churches in other communities. In fact, we see that process repeating itself right now. Slightly under twenty years ago, BIEM supported evangelism and church-planting in the military town of Desna, Ukraine. As souls came to Christ, various members matured spiritually and left to minister elsewhere.

Supported by BIEM, Sasha and Ira Petrenko left Desna to minister farther north, in Goncharivske. Even though the congregation they lead is young, the Petrenkos had a vision to evangelize the neighboring town of Smolin. They opted to begin with children’s ministry.

As often happens in tight-knit communities, some locals in Smolin opposed



For now, church services in Smolin take place in this military-style tent.

the Petrenkos’ Christian day camps. However, the Petrenkos and their team persevered, even if with modest numbers of kids. And God worked. This past summer, some parents who previously resisted the day camps personally escorted their kids and allowed them to attend!

Fast forwarding to our current time, the Petrenkos are spearheading a church construction project in Smolin. Of course, evangelism continues, too. Here’s an excerpt from Sasha’s January report:

“Allow me to start by thanking BIEM for the material aid we received for Christmas gifts. We had the opportunity to distribute Christmas gifts to kids, for which they were very glad and thankful.

“Also, we did a special evangelistic project. We purchased various items to assemble packages of foods, sweets, and vitamins. Then we set out to visit underprivileged families living in Smolin and Zhevedy in order to give them these gifts

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Christmas provided an occasion to visit families. Believers sang carols and delivered gift boxes of food, sweets, and Bibles.



Of course, a brief summary of Christ’s birth accompanies each visit.

An Unplanned Meeting with the Lord

BIEM national missionary Nikolai Ryzhuk leads the congregation in Drogichin, Belarus, but also has a heart for other towns and villages. He shares how God used him in a church that has no pastor.

Yesterday I once again visited the church in Ivanovo, where I conducted the Lord's Supper. This little church consists of eight members. They have no preacher, no minister. The church is just eight Christian women and their children. Seeing such a pitiful situation, I can't be apathetic. I drive over to preach for them twice a month (sometimes more often), and I lead them in the Lord's Supper.

My sermon yesterday was on the theme "The Lamb of God," based on Revelation 5. While I was speaking, a stranger came in. He held a Bible. That Bible looked quite worn, leading me to conclude it had been read often.

At the conclusion of the service, I invited everyone to stand for prayer. This



Victor met Christ in a little church he'd never intended to visit.

fellow suddenly stood and declared, "I'm a sinner. I want to repent."

We prayed, and—praise God!—this stranger prayed the sinner's prayer of repentance!

Afterward, I invited this man to tell us about himself.

He introduced himself as Victor. "I'm from the Kobrin area, from the village

of Yeremichi. I was in the rehabilitation center in Kobrin for drunkenness. Half a year ago, I completed the rehab program. This morning I was traveling to the town of Dymnoye in Pinsk region. I arrived here in Ivanovo by train, and from here I need to proceed by bus. But while I waited for the bus, my conscience bothered me. I understood I was a guilty sinner. Since I knew there must be a morning service somewhere, I began searching for a church."

As I listened to his testimony, I couldn't help rejoicing in how good God is to people. Yeremichi is 80 km from Ivanovo. That church of eight women is the smallest one in Ivanovo. But as God worked in Victor, He gave him a route to Dymnoye that led straight to a meeting with the Lord. Praise be to Jesus Christ!

The ministry that rehabilitation center is doing for God is not in vain. They sowed the seed of the Word of God, and God performed a great work in the soul of Victor. We will pray for God to strengthen Victor's faith. ■

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"Reaching the world for Christ since 1981"

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along with Scriptures. We also wanted to tell them about the miraculous birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ, and invite them to a church service. We gave Bibles to each family we visited and shared the Gospel.

"In these villages, people live quite poorly. The majority drink out of despair. When you see people who dwell in horrible

conditions and see how their children are growing up, it's very sad. In one family, we arrived during a time of sorrow. The father told how, that very day, his daughter from his first marriage had hung herself. She was only twenty-one. She had hung herself from a birch tree near the kindergarten. He cried bitterly. Many lives are full of such despair.

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Despite winter, construction on the church building continues.

Blessings of Summer Camp

If you were to ask BIEM's missionaries why they love camp, that would be a terrific question. After all, camps require lots of planning, volunteers, loads of energy, patience, time away from other activities, and sometimes they cost sleep. Are they truly worth the effort?

Absolutely! Camps for kids and teens provide multiple benefits:

- Youth who don't attend church hear the Gospel.
- Kids learn to pray.

- Some repent and come to Christ.
- Saved kids benefit from daily Bible lessons and memory verses—discipleship!
- Via camp, parents and grandparents sometimes hear the Gospel. (This is how some believers in our churches came to Christ!)
- Camps give inexperienced believers a chance to serve.
- Camps also bolster churches' public relations in their communities.

- Sometimes, camps result in a nucleus of new believers, leading to a new church.

However, quality camps require one thing not mentioned above—funding. Typically, each year BIEM disburses \$40,000 for food, Bibles, sports and game equipment, craft supplies, gasoline, and the miscellaneous expenses of running a camp. Currently we have \$6,454 for camps in 2021. If you would like to contribute, please mark your gift "Summer Camps."

Thanks for helping! ■



Kids come to camp for the fun, but many meet the Savior there.



Camp provides an ideal setting to delve into God's Word with youth.

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"Following that project, that family came to a Sunday service—Tolya, Valya, and their son Nazar. After the service, we sat and ate lunch together. For a long while, Tolya studied us in a quiet manner.

Eventually he began to talk about his life. Specifically, in his youth he had served in Afghanistan and fought there. He'd been a sniper. It was evident that his younger days had affected him. They also came to the worship service this past Sunday.

"We are praying and planning to do a similar project for Easter. That will give us another chance to share about Christ and to demonstrate the love of God.

"This Sunday was particularly cold. I was apprehensive about holding a service [in the temporary tent]. Would people come, or would they stay home? But—praise God! It was a remarkable service, and the cold didn't hinder it. Afterward, nobody hurried home. As we normally do, we fellowshiped and ate together.

"Praise God, the construction work on the church in Smolin is going forward. Each day, the building is taking shape. Please continue to pray for this important project."

BIEM is now involved in three church-building projects. If you would like to help, please designate your gift "Church Buildings." ■



One neighbor visited a service and enjoyed it so much he made a video and brought his family the following week!



This homemade woodburning device provides heat for tent services.

Quick Glimpses

Our newsletter is too short to include full articles about every development in the mission fields. However, the following photos will give you a few peeks. Thank you for helping us to minister for the Lord!



Borschiv, Ukraine

The new church building in Borschiv, Ukraine, allowed the Skripniks to hold a Christmas service for neighborhood kids.



Drohichin, Belarus

Our missionaries in Belarus, the Ryzhuks, announced May 29 as the wedding date for their son Tolik and Sasha, who came to Christ through the church.



Ternopil, Ukraine

Winter and Covid prevented his church from baptizing in the usual locations, so Vitaly Bilyak (Ternopil, Ukraine) constructed a portable baptistry. It works fine!



USA

After a long absence due to Covid-19, our missionaries Vitaly and Olena Yurchenko flew to the U.S. in February to speak in a number of churches. They're a blessing!

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By "liking" BIEM on Facebook, you can receive updates, blessings, prayer requests ... even an occasional video from our mission fields. See you there!



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Baptist-International-Evangelistic-Ministries>



Lviv, Ukraine

In Lviv, Ukraine, the church continues reconstruction, which will result in a building that is warmer, more attractive, and much more suitable for public services.



Moscow, Russia

In the Moscow area, "Liberation" Christian rehabilitation center continues guiding alcoholics and drug addicts to new life in Christ. Daily Bible studies are the core of the program.