



BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

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Focusing Faith and Family on “Friendship”

Choose Life Baptist Church in the Druzhba (“Friendship”) district of Ternopil, Ukraine, is off to an excellent start. Here’s the couple who are focusing their faith and family on reaching Druzhba for Christ!



The Druzhba district has become home to thousands of refugees who fled Ukraine’s battle zones.

Sergiy’s story

When Sergiy Koop was 3, his mother died in an auto accident. Because his father had been the driver, Sergiy was left with his grandmother while his father went to prison. Sergiy recalls, “After a while, my father was released from prison, remarried, and had two more kids. His second wife didn’t want to take care of my sister and me, so we were always hungry and dirty. Dad didn’t seem to see that...”

The grandmother took Sergiy and his sister to live with her. More importantly, she took them to church. Later, Sergiy was passed around relatives.

“After Dad and his second wife divorced, he took me back. He treated me cruelly and took things out on me physically and emotionally. School and church were the only places he allowed me to go.

That’s why, every day after school, after finishing my household chores, I went to church. I didn’t want to stay home.”

However, Sergiy says he understood almost nothing at church. “The preachers always said, ‘God is love,’ but I couldn’t understand that. I had questions like, ‘If God is love, why is my life so bad?’”

That situation changed when he was 18: “Jesus talked to me in my thoughts and told me that all the sorrow in my family was because my father lived however he wanted, contrary to God’s ways.” However, Jesus surrounded Sergiy with Christians who demonstrated His love.

When Sergiy realized this, he says, “I got down on my knees and repented of my hatred, of my sins, and asked Him to be with me and to keep working in my heart. I devoted my life to Him and said I’d like to serve Him to the last day of my life.”

When war erupted in eastern Ukraine in 2014, Sergiy’s church closed. He couldn’t find work in that Mariupol area. His sister had moved to the U.S., but Sergiy felt God calling him to Ternopil. There, he became the youth pastor at New

Life Baptist Church under BIEM’s Vitaly Bilyak.

Eventually, Sergiy’s father placed his trust in Christ, too. Sergiy experienced the thrill of attending his dad’s baptism. Their relationship has been restored.

A motivating factor for Sergiy in church planting is that he credits the church with saving his life. “I wanted to plant churches in places where there are none, so that people who suffer from evil, as I did, can find salvation and comfort in Jesus through the church, as I did.”

Karina’s side

Growing up, Karina considered herself a normal child of Christian parents. “My parents always read us the Bible and taught us how to pray... I knew all the Christian-related things. At the same time, as an ordinary kid, I wasn’t always perfect.” She emphasizes that even though she had been taught to behave correctly and knew the Bible, that didn’t mean she was a child of God: “Being a daughter of a pastor doesn’t mean you’re automatically

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Sergiy has delighted in explaining the Gospel to civilians near the battle zones.

...**“Friendship” district** *continued from page 1* a child of God, so one day I had to make that decision.”

When Karina was 12, her family attended a festival where the preacher



In June, the Lord added a third member to the Koops' home. They named their firstborn daughter Karolina (pronounced kar-oh-LEE-nah).

spoke on the love of God. Karina had heard this message hundreds of times, but this time it touched her heart. “I understood that I’m a sinner and asked God to forgive my sins and clean my heart. That was the day God became not only the God of my parents, but my God as well. ... Now I have a great husband who shares my values. We serve together as church planters.”

Active in God’s work

Sergiy and Karina Koop rejoice to see God using them to draw others to Himself. They and their team reach out to both locals and refugees in Druzhba. (When Sergiy tells refugees he’s from Mariupol—a southeastern city that Russians have occupied since May 2022—that link forms an immediate bond.)

Sergiy called July “a gathering of the harvest” because three people accepted Christ as Savior in different services.

The camps they and their volunteers held for kids and teens provided wonderful opportunities to meet new people and to share the Gospel. In July they held an “extreme” camping trip for youth. “Our team noticed the campers were especially open to hearing the Gospel. We read the Bible with them every day. They asked many questions and were open to talking about God, which is rare. At the end of camp, one girl repented during a personal conversation. ... She told us it took her a long time to do this, and she was happy it

happened in camp. The next week, three girls who had been in camp came to the youth Bible study group. ...”

In August, Sergiy joyfully baptized some new believers in a joint service with New Life Baptist Church, where his father-in-law Vitaly Bilyak is pastor.

Concluding a recent letter to the BIEM home office, Sergiy wrote, “I love it so much when God works and saves people through us. This inspires me to serve Him and to be a part of His unbelievable work of saving people.”

Financially, the Koops’ greatest need is regular monthly support (although one-time gifts are welcome). If you would like to help, please designate your gift “National Church Planters.” If you would like to subscribe to the Koops’ quarterly reports, we’ll be happy to add you. Thank you for caring and sharing!

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“Reaching the world for Christ since 1981”
Dr. Peter Slobodian, Founder

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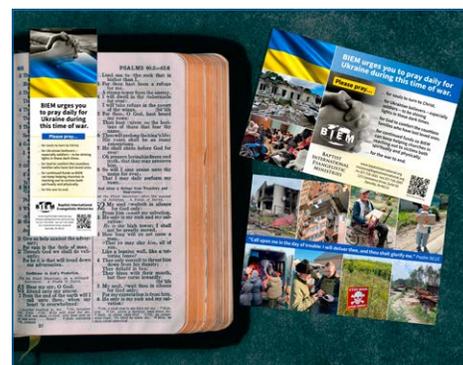
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“I wish you could’ve seen Sasha’s face when I called him to the baptistry! He ran to me and was baptized with a huge smile as if he were going to Heaven.”



Prayer Cards & Bookmarks

Because our missionaries and ministry partners in Ukraine urge us to keep praying for them, BIEM is including special prayer reminders with our 2024 calendar. (More are available by request.) Please place the prayer card in a prominent location where you and others will be reminded to pray. The bookmark is intended for your Bible, where it can prompt prayers during your quiet time with God. James 5:16 declares, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Thank you for each valuable prayer!

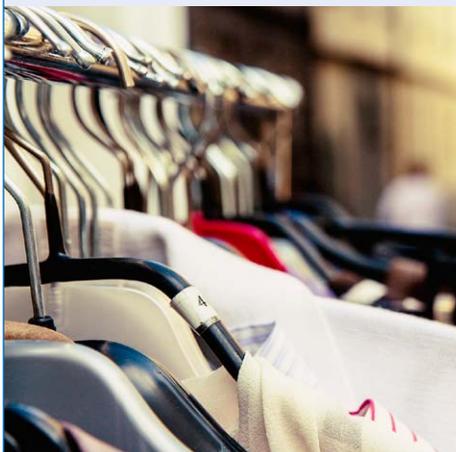
“Too much stuff!”

From a friend of BIEM...

“Recently I stood in my walk-in closet holding an armload of clothes from the laundry. There was nowhere to hang them. I thought, ‘I like my home, but it’s too small to hold all my stuff.’ In the blink of an eye, the Holy Spirit slipped a rebuke to my mind: ‘The house is fine. You keep too much stuff!’

“Instantly, I began pulling shirts, hoodies, jackets, and coats off hangers for BIEM’s war relief. Spare blankets, too. Some clothes I hadn’t worn for a year, but I’d clung to them even after so many Ukrainians fled homes and lost everything. I’m not rich, but compared to those refugees, I really am. Please add these items to your next shipment overseas.”

Dear friends, we at BIEM can’t express how much our Ukrainian churches appreciate your aid. We share this note in case you, too, are clinging to extra “stuff.” Donations of gently used clothing, shoes, blankets, crutches, walkers, and wheelchairs for Ukraine are greatly needed. You may drop them off (BIEM, 121 Commerce Drive, Suite 50, Danville, IN 46122) or ship them to us. (Forms for tax deductions available upon request.)



Quick Glimpses



Since its construction just a few years ago, House of Prayer Baptist Church in Bilogorodka, Ukraine, has become especially popular for summer camps!

These counselors in the Republic of Georgia took very seriously their training to minister to young campers in the that nation.



Our church plant in Chervona Sloboda, Ukraine, is experiencing a wonderful problem—lack of space! The congregation is currently expanding their building.



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...Quick Glimpses continued from page 3



This summer, multiple churches in western Belarus once again provided an encouraging camp geared especially for the needs of widows.

At this camp in Central Russia, Olesya is enjoying sharing her firm faith in the Lord with children and teens.



Between Bible lessons, these campers in Belarus engaged in various fun activities, including creating sand castles!



These Ukrainian soldiers are a few of many who have sent BIEM thanks for New Testaments (blue and gold covers) and foodstuffs.



Blessed News from Central Asia

BIEM's Field Director for Central Asia texted us the following...

"Praising God as I have been sharing the Gospel with a student in a Taliban center in Kabul for about a month now. The last two days, much more contact with him. He just wrote this to me:

'I was already sure that Jesus is the son of God and that He sacrificed Himself on the cross for our sins, but I was waiting for His sign. Ever since I read and think about this Bible, I have a strange feeling. A feeling I never had before. I feel at peace with this book. I feel that someone loves me as if he is waiting for me. Like a father waiting for his lost son. Today when I was sleeping, I felt someone calling me, and when I woke up, no one was in the room except me. I took this as a sign. Now I believe with all my heart and soul that Jesus is God and He is my Savior.'

Thank you, friends of BIEM, for upholding us in prayer. God's Word is impacting lives!