



## The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Report, 2022

#### April

Dear brothers and sisters, coworkers of the BIEM mission, partners, and friends, we greet you with the love of our Savior Jesus Christ. Our friendship with you has been and still is a great blessing.

From the first day of the war, we have felt your help and support. Your prayers, your interest and your activity are what helps us to feel the great team in ministry, the great family of God's real children.

As I wrote in my last long letter, our emphasis, our resources, and strength in ministry were dedicated to refugees. Making packs of groceries, searching for places for them to live, preparing dwelling quarters, medical treatment and medicines, community services and help with documents... We ended up dealing with all these things and much more simultaneously. There seemed to be no end of it! The number of refugees only increased... There came a moment when we realized that we had entirely forgotten about the poor people from our own city, about our relatives, neighbors, and the elderly. They, too, had become even more needy during the war, and the lonely began to feel even more alone. As one old saying goes, "You can't see the forest behind the trees." That's how it was with us—in helping the far-off ones, we lost sight of our own.

At a meeting of the coordinators of the refugee ministry, it was decided that each church would prepare assistance for people from our city.

Somebody took to it upon himself to agree that the social service that takes care of these poor, needy people will warn and invite them to the churches for food aid. And at one point, on a day when there were many refugees in the church, people started coming. They said that a social worker called them and told them to come to this address to get help. It was somewhat of a surprise.

To be honest, we were not even fully prepared for such a number of needy people. Yes, we had a good supply of food, but we had planned to invite these people in a few days.





Therefore, everything had to be reorganized very quickly. Most of the volunteers and friends from the church continued to help the refugees, and a few other people and I began helping people from the city.

All these people came to receive more than just help. We sensed that they wanted to talk, to express something... These were lonely old people, disabled people, people who found themselves in very difficult life circumstances, or had a sick relative, wife, or husband at home.

Meeting with refugees, I sometimes saw smiles. Someone would try to joke but these people were in not state for joking. All these people were very sad. They all needed hope, a word of encouragement. About 100 people received aid that day. However, I wanted them to receive more than just food. I wanted them to hear a word of hope. Therefore, when there were only 5-6 people in the queue, I called for a short pause in the process of distributing aid, and I addressed those new people with a word.

In each of my speeches, I mentioned several important points.

I wanted them to know for sure that this help is from believers, not from the government. I explained to them why we do it. It was at this moment that I had an excellent opportunity to preach the Gospel. They needed to hear about God's love for them, about God's care. We invited these people to come to church and some people came.

Please pray concerning the opportunities that God is opening for the church at this time. We do not want to become a social center. We want to be a church that proclaims the Gospel. Please pray for God's work among these people we are dealing with and to whom we preach the Gospel.

With best wishes, your brother,  
Your brother Vitaly Bilyak

## May

### *Children's Camp in a Bomb Shelter*

Every summer our church has held many different camps. Preparing for the camps was an anticipation of a holiday, a celebration and activity. Although the camp ministry required a lot of effort, resources, meetings, and preparation, it was always something solemn, dynamic, and special...

We usually held camps for children, teenagers, youth, and families. Each of these categories is unique, and each needed a special approach. The life of the church changed closer to the summer, due to preparations for the camps. Leaders have always planned their holidays. We reserved bases or areas to hold the camps. To some extent, the summer was the culmination of the gospel. All our efforts, all our acquaintances with people, personal and in the ministry, were ultimately expressed in the people who went to our camps.

On February 24, the war began. Literally a week before the war, we had a meeting of leaders where we again planned our camps. We talked about the dates, about the locations where we were to hold these camps, prayed for the families, children, teenagers, youth...

The war ruined all our plans, or almost all our plans for the summer.

When we started talking about the camps, we realized that only one format is possible in a war—a children's day camp near the church. An important consideration for the camps is the safety of the children. We understood that during war it is impossible to pick up children or youth and take them away 200 km from their parents. What if the situation gets worse? What if it's dangerous in the region where we're going? What if a new front opens from Belarus? And what if there will be an arrival in our city, and we will be far away? Children's day camp was the only format where we could ensure the safety of children, where we do not take them away from their parents. We have a basement in the church—a shelter, and in the school where we usually hold camps, there is also a shelter—a bomb shelter.

Youth from the church, as well as young people from among the refugees, organized themselves into a team and prepared a program for this camp. It must be said that the Lord greatly blessed their work.

This camp was held from July 11th to 15th.



Mostly children from our region came to the camp. We noticed that even acquaintances who live in remote areas were afraid to let their children go far. God also regulated the number of children by the weather. Usually, the situation looks like this: 40 people come on the first day



of the camp, 60 people come on the second day, and more than 100 people come to the end of the camp. This camp was on average up to 50 people. This has its own explanations. There are a lot of children now with their parents abroad. Many children stay at home due to constant air raid alerts. And of course, the Lord regulated the number of children with rain, which was almost every day.

But this camp was also remembered by everyone for the air-raid alarms that were at the time when the camp was going on. When the siren sounded, the leaders immediately gathered all the children and led them to the church basement, where the games continued. They made crafts and ate snacks there. When the “all clear” siren sounded, they went back outdoors. During one of the alarms in this camp, rockets hit a neighboring city similar to ours, the city of Vinnitsa. They didn’t hit any kind of military facility; they hit downtown, where many people were going about their own business. Children, women, teenagers, taxi drivers, and doctors died there... After this shelling, the Russian

media wrote that the Russian army had successfully hit military targets in Vinnitsa and Ternopil. Thank God, it didn’t reach us. Some of the missiles were shot down by Ukrainian air defense. Perhaps these were the missiles that were supposed to fly to Ternopil. The Lord is very kind to us.



Friends, thank you for being with us during this difficult time. Thank you for praying for us, for our families, for our ministry. Thank you for supporting Ukraine financially. Please continue to pray for the children who have heard the gospel. Please pray for leaders who are weary. Please pray for us to understand how we as a church can be most effective in serving the Lord during this time.

I have a special prayer need. Our son-in-law Sergey and daughter Karina decided to plant a new church in Ternopil. They used to plan to move to Kyiv or another large city to start a new church, but after the war started and many people came to our city, they saw that many newcomers were open to the Gospel. They decided to establish a new church in an area of our city where there is no Baptist church. There are two largest universities in that region (Economic and Pedagogical), a lot of young people there. And that area is close to the city center. Please pray for the beginning of this work. From August 15th to 20th, they plan to hold an evangelistic outreach in the area, plus a children’s day camp.

With best wishes and blessings, your brother in Christ,  
Vitaly Bilyak

## June

Greetings, friends,

Today, as I write this letter, Ukraine is on day 149 of the war. Everything is geared for the war. The economy, businesses, banks, people's lives—everything relates to the war. Everything that we had planned before the war has changed. The war brought its own adjustments, its own reality.

Unfortunately, there are no books on ecclesiology or on family life that tell how the church or a family should live during a war. Probably, even if there were such books, we would not have read them. We did not want to believe there would be a war—but it came. I had to learn on the go. Make quick decisions.

The first month of the war for our church was very difficult, as for everyone else—it was a shock, trying to do the right thing... Even the Bible texts were read in a special way. David's psalms were very popular in the early days of the war. This book seemed to be the most suitable for the situation. David's psalms resonated greatly in our hearts. It seemed that David, like no one else, understood what you were feeling. It even seemed to me that now I understand David better in his feelings when he talks about enemies.

But then there came a certain awakening. I realized that for some time I had lost sight of Jesus Christ. I caught myself thinking that David had become dearer to me than Jesus Christ.

Slowly, we began to come to our senses, to realize that God has plans for each of us. But even more, He has plans for our church. We understood that the church must remain the church.



This does not mean that we now ignore the war. Not at all. We are more aware that, during this war, God has high expectations from the church. She must be salt and light for this world.

Then we decided to talk about baptism, and we began to prepare people for baptism. We resumed holding home groups. The youth started holding youth meetings. We resumed working with kids. We reestablished the prayer group we had before the war. During the war, I counseled two young people who were planning to get married.

At some point, I realized that we had not had fraternal fellowship for a long time. There hadn't been an opportunity to talk with the brothers about what everyone was experiencing, what they were praying for, and what they are afraid of. The Lord put on my heart to invite all the brothers to my home to eat and talk together. It turned out that, for the first time since the beginning of the war, many of them ate meat from the grill. We laughed and talked—it was by God's grace. Our meeting ended with a prayer for each other. It was a celebration of unity and support. Praise the Lord for the fact that His church is an active, living organism, which is especially valuable in times of war. And the Lord has blessed us with several wonderful times in which we could feel His closeness and grace, feel like a church.

I want to talk about baptism. Five people made a covenant with the Lord. These people were all quite different. Some were refugees. Among them was a young guy, a journalist who, even before the war, had repented and attended church. Valera comes from a rehabilitation center. His life is a great testimony of God's miracle. From a bum, from a complete alcoholic who lost everything including family, respect, health, and home, the Lord resurrected and revived him for a new life.



Another great moment for the church was the wedding of Sergei and Irina. These young people are very committed Christians. Good servants. They planned this wedding even before the war. We had made plans, thought about the decorations, but when the war came, minor things got pushed aside, but the main thing remained. For the church, the wedding was a good encouragement, a reminder that the Lord is good, that He can bless families, that life goes on.

Dear friends, please pray for us, for our family, so that peace comes to Ukraine and the church of Christ remains light and salt for this world. Please pray for all my brothers and sisters who are working for His glory.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,  
Vitaly Bilyak from Ternopil

*Special note from the home office of BIEM...*

The Bilyaks' son-in-law and daughter (Sergei & Karina Koop) feel led to plant a "daughter church" in a district of Ternopil that has no church. This new outreach could use a laptop computer (\$500 still needed), which would be used in a variety of ministries. Also, in the mother church, the Bilyaks could use a new projector (\$300) to replace their aging one. If you would like to give toward either purchase, please designate your gift "Bilyaks – Technology."