



**TERNOPIL, UKRAINE**  
*1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2016 Report*

**January**

Greetings to you in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Normally in my letters I describe something from our ministry. I will always write about things we have done, or that we plan to do. But this time I was to write about the background in which we have to serve. The goal of this letter is for prayerful support in order to serve effectively in our religious atmosphere.

In Ukraine they say, “The way you begin the New Year is the same way you will live it.” There is something to this. Here in Ukraine—and especially here in the west of it—nearly all of January is a season of celebrating holidays. But in January there are a bunch of religious holidays. It all begin with the New Year. Of course, everyone celebrates a bright new year, and following that comes Christmas, from January 7-9. A few days after that comes January 14, the holiday of “Old New Year” (my sympathies to whomever translates this). This is New Year’s Day according to old Julian calendar. Along with this, they celebrate the holiday of St. Vasily. Then January 19-20 is the holiday called “Baptism of Jesus.” And when you realize that these holidays normally fall on weekdays, the average person hardly works at all. And these are only the major holidays. In addition to them there are other single-day holidays. Such strong traditions exist only here in western Ukraine. It is considered a sin to work on such days. It is understandable if people skip work for Christmas or Baptism, but for three days? You what is amazing—sinning on those days isn’t considered sinning. :) They consider it a sin to work, but they don’t consider it a sin to drink vodka, or to cuss, or to gossip about each other... Observing such a “cultural” background, we always ponder how we as a church can influence society and change sinful traditions by filling them with meaning. We came to several specific decisions concerning holidays.

First, we decided that for the main religious holidays (only those that are mentioned in the Gospel) will hold themed services, to which will be sure to invite our "religious" friends. Then, if people will invite us to their various celebrations, we will go, but for the purpose of telling them about God. Last, we decided not to annoy our religious friends with our lack of respect for their holidays. We decided not to work, not because it is a sin, but because we want to show respect, which will give us an opportunity to witness to them about Christ.

This January, God gave us the opportunity to celebrate the New Year with friends. We had a great time chatting, singing, playing games, and we laughed, prayed... Then at Christmas held a special Christmas service, which was attended by children from the children's clubs. And on the Baptism holiday we held a service dedicated to this event in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Interestingly, many people appreciated that. It pleased people who simply use the holiday as a chance to sit at the holiday table. After such meetings, people say to us in surprise, "I never thought that you could celebrate without vodka, without scandals, and that the most important thing is the meaning."

Friends, please pray for our ministry among religious friends.

## February

### *Trip to the Republic of Georgia*

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters!

In this letter I want to share about the blessings I received during my trip to Georgia. I had planned on making such a trip for a long time, and in February an opportunity opened up. I really want to share these blessings with you because this greatly strengthened me for what we are doing here in Ternopil. We realize very well that this is our joint ministry with you, so I consider it important to tell you about fruits of the ministry.

It turned out in such a way in our ministry with several addicted men from Georgia (Zurab, Temur, and Nukzar) that we all met in our rehabilitation center, which had only recently opened. Our young New Life Church in Ternopil had only about ten people at that time. We had barely begun the rehabilitation ministry. From Georgia, where is Ternopil? But by some miraculous means the Lord brought these unhappy sinners to us.

Zurab was a drug addict with much experience, rotting feet, AIDS and many other diseases. As a result of this horrible, ruinous addiction, he lost not only his life, health, and family, but also all his identification documents. And here comes this foreign guy addicted to drugs, a man who really has no legal rights.

Then there was Temur, who was a young addict. He has a Christian family... But sin, like narcotics, doesn't stop to ask whether you have a Christian wife or believing relatives. It simply destroys your life. Though our BIEM mission, someone there in Georgia learned that we had begun ministering to addicted men.

And the third man who came to us was Nukzar. He had problems with alcohol. The first two were already with us. I remember picking him up in Kiev. It was a six-hour drive back from there. I began talking to get acquainted—but it was hard for him even to understand Russian. And our church services are all held in Ukrainian! Thankfully, our ministers were able to speak Russian.

We were not very experienced, so when I look at the results in the lives of these men, I understand that the result did not come due to our doing everything properly. All three of these men finished the rehabilitation program and went home to Georgia. From time to time we would hear through mutual acquaintances that the Lord was upholding these men. We rejoiced at the fact that genuine fruit from the ministry was still visible years later. Five years later the Lord gave us another meeting.

This meeting convinced me that this was God's own amazing work. Temur and Zurab used the help of a small church and began a little rehabilitation center near Tbilisi. One of their parents offered a small house they owned for this ministry. Zurab left his city of Batumi, where he had lived and earned money. They had 7 dependent Georgian men there. Alcoholics, drug addicts, with criminal histories, with untreatable diseases... And thus they work humbly, doing what they can, without pathos, with cautious optimism, without special experience, without the support of any sort of large center, they have begun by using what they remembered from how it was with us. It's amazing. Perhaps if they had a rehab center next to a large church they would not have enough boldness, but these godly people are heroes today, and they need our prayers and support.

Nukzar has organized and serves in two mountain churches (it didn't work out for me to see him during this trip). It was very pleasant to serve in some small churches in Tbilisi. The joyful Georgians and their hospitality—that is a whole other story. The meetings were in informal circumstances, a brotherly breakfast, meeting with families, many testimonies... I don't know how useful I was to them, but I received encouragement and once more am persuaded that our Lord is great and very good. It was great to see and get acquainted with the fruit that these men's lives have already

brought forth (souls saved through their testimonies). Probably the most special moment of all was kneeling and praying on a mountain within sight of Tbilisi with Zurab and Lasha (a missionary of our mission).

Please pray for these brethren and their not-so-easy ministry!

## **March**

Peace to you, dear friends. As always, I am glad to share with you some of the blessings from our ministry.

In this letter I would like to share a bit of the joy I experience as the pastor of a young church. We have done a lot for the ministry of the church. We as a family have given up much. There was a time when we prayed for the Lord to send people to the church who could serve others. There were various expectations concerning how people would serve... Time passed. There were diverse people. Some agreed to help in various projects. It wasn't hard to find people to help in summer camps. Yet, it's always hard to find dedicated, faithful people willing to commit to routine, continual matters. Therefore, for me, special heroes of the faith are those people who have taken upon themselves the responsibility to hold classes with children and teens.

Then construction began in the church. People began to work. In various ways we tried to decide how to provide food for the ones who were working in the church. This is especially touching, when helpers work voluntarily and not for money. In such moments we especially understood that it was only right to feed these people. We brought up this need at church, and our sisters began to help with it. They coordinate it among themselves and each in turn prepares something for everyone working at the church to eat. This creates a very positive atmosphere.

The brothers and sisters who regularly pick up and clean up in the church are deserving of separate thanks. As some of you know, part of the building that we have acquired and are repairing is already used for our ministries. All meetings except Sunday services are now held in the new location. Repair work is going on there mornings and afternoons, which creates a lot of dust. So in the evening we need to move everything and clean it so that people who come for Bible studies or other gatherings don't breathe in this dust or have an allergic reaction. For me it's always nice to see when someone has written "I will come today and clean up" or simply that someone will come an hour early: "I have some spare time. I want to prepare the meeting place." These people uplift me as the pastor. It's also pleasant to have fruit in the ministry of the Rehabilitation Center. There are several men in the Rehab Center who are always glad to come and help in church. With the aid of these fellows, we have achieved no small amount of work.

Please pray with us for the Lord to send workers into His harvest field. At the moment we are particularly needy for a youth pastor. We need leaders for the children's ministry. There is a group of more than 30 children that we would like to divide.

With best wishes,  
Your brother in the Lord,  
Vitaly Bilyak

Progress on the Rehabilitation Center



With the men of the Rehab Center



Visiting brethren in the Republic of Georgia...



Reconstruction work in our new church building



Much-appreciated meals in the making!

