



**The Bilyaks  
3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Report 2016**

**July**

Greetings to you, brothers and sisters, coworkers with God!

I'm very glad to inform you that God was very good to us all summer. In my last letter I wrote about our extreme teen-youth camp. Today I'd like to share some blessings concerning the "Choose Life" project, which consisted of two days camps and social work.

What is special about this project is that it's a joint ministry for God performed by the youth of our church and youth from other churches in our brotherhood. In addition to the positive benefits of having a chance to chat and get acquainted and gain new friends, we had the opportunity to learn together alongside people we didn't even know two years ago. This is an amazing chance to feel unity in Christ. People who were strangers yesterday can serve in a common project today. But this didn't affect only our portion of the team as concerns the youth who came to Ternopil to help. Each of those who came here got acquainted with the rest of the team. This is very simple; if you have common goals, you have the same understanding of God, the same values, and the desire to accept other members of the team. One interesting observation I had as pastor: Within our brotherhood of churches there's a variety of traditions for conducting worship services, the music, expectations concerning clothing and cosmetics. All this was reflected in the team. One in the team would enjoy more modern music, while another was more conservative in this, and it was the same in other situations. When they arrived, they were willing to adapt and accept our church with its distinct characteristics. All week I could lead this company of young people and listen to their discussions, take part in their talks, but for all that their various views on secondary things did not divide them. As I gazed at them, I realized this was precious: "unity in diversity." This is exactly what allows us to accept various people into the church. Each person, each family, is unique. They have been raised various ways, they've gained various tastes in music, art, various traditions... But in coming to Calvary, we all become forgiven sinners, and minor issues go to the wayside.

The team arrived on a Saturday afternoon. It's interesting that they got to the church earlier than our team. On that day we had only just returned from our extreme camp. We got acquainted at the church. The Sunday service was also special. Young brothers preached. Our guests quoted poems, and they sang both new and older songs that we knew. There was fellowship, a good atmosphere, we ate pizza and on Sunday immediately set out to distribute invitations for children and youth to our meetings. We put more of an emphasis on evangelism in the region where our church is located. We worried a bit about whether people would come, whether they would permit children to come to our camp. The fact is that last spring the local priest started a program of intimidating people. A lot of local kids had come to our church for children's meetings. Some days we had up to 50 children, but then the number sharply declined. It turns out that the local priest had begun to frighten people, saying we are a cult and that if

anyone were to permit their kids, then he wouldn't baptize or marry or bury people in such families. For our people, this is similar to the time of Christ, when people were threatened with separation from the synagogue. But by God's grace children came. On the first day about 50 children attended; on the last day it was about 90. We truly hope this will open opportunities to get to know their families, their parents.

The day camp went according to our typical schedule: games, contests, a Bible lesson, a snack, craft time, more games. There was a very good atmosphere. It was very interesting to observe how many parents came to camp to hear what we were saying, what we were teaching the children. It's always a big blessing to listen to the prayers of children in response to the Bible lesson.

Then we had lunch for the team in the church, and after a short rest the team got involved in a social project. We did various useful things. First of all, we helped the local school with cleaning up their playground. Especially appreciated by the school was that the group cut the grass at the sports stadium. No one had mowed the grass there since last spring. It was not easy, but we got it done. It was interesting to watch when the team picked up litter along the street close to the church. Each of them wearing identical tee shirts, young men and women swept the street and trimmed the grass in the flowerbeds. Many people stopped and inquired when the church would open so they could come to services.

In the evening we held a youth time. It's a little similar to youth evening camp. We held a volleyball tournament. In the park not far from the church we set up soccer goals donated by the BIEM ministry. While one person played guitar, others sang Christian songs. Others chatted. Someone would give a testimony of salvation. We exchanged contact information so we could invite them later to our youth meetings.

We're very thankful to God for such a full, active week. Thank you for praying for us and for your financial support of our ministry.

## **August**

Peace to you, dear friend, coworkers with God!

God is very good to us all, giving us the possibility of serving Him according to the place where He has put us. We feel the effectiveness in various degrees. When we feel apathy and are uncertain that anyone has noticed and appreciates our ministry, then He encourages us through His Word, reminding us that our *"labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

But sometimes God rewards us with the chance to see personally some sort of result, and this naturally lifts us up and implants the desire to serve Him further. This is exactly what I'd like to share with you, so that not only will I be lifted up, but also you, who do not always know what is happening in this ministry that you support financially and prayerfully.

It is about camp ministry. I hope this letter will be an encouragement for those who already are involved in these projects and will be prompted to accept participation for those who still haven't gotten involved. I've already written in past months some letters in which I told about the extreme youth camp and the project of day camps. The youth and children's camps have become "normal things" for us. But the Lord did something special with our plans for this year. We looked over our finances and understood that it wasn't going to work out for us to hold a huge evangelistic camp for children. As it goes, having a camp with just a small number of children isn't the best. The kids get bored since there isn't the same dynamics, the same atmosphere. A dilemma arose. Should we totally back off from organizing a day camp for

children? We couldn't, since there are children who actively attend our meetings and for them a camp serves as a special stimulus. During these musings, the Lord put on my heart to organize a family camp. We could invite children and pay for their rest, but along with the kids we'd invite their parents. (We would suggest the parents pay their own lodging, and we could pay part of their transportation costs.) We considered our budget and realized this idea could be workable. We prayed and began preparations.

First of all, we invited all the children who attend our children's meetings and their parents. As you probably recall, the kids who attend our children's ministry are from typical and mostly non-Christian homes. Keeping that fact in mind, our camp should aim more for evangelism. In addition, we saw that God was calling us to the path of working with families. And this was something that could be a good start of a family outreach. Thus, after several months of preparation, discussions, and concerns, we set out for the mountains. Friends, this was a blessed camp in all ways. The number of people who went was exactly the number we could lodge and feed, 96 people in all. We had 11 full families (husband, wife, kids) and 10 partial families (divorced parents or one spouse couldn't get away for camp) and almost 40 children. A large percentage of people in our camp needed salvation, and we were able to preach at our gatherings.

Our camp's program was simple enough, and it allowed much time for conversations. A typical day went like this: After breakfast we had activity time (hiking on the mountain, rafting, water games, a trip to the local market). After lunch the parents had the option of hearing seminars for married couples. We had invited along friends from Vinnitsa, a couple that conducts such seminars for married couples. While the parents were there, the children were in children's Bible lessons. After lunch, everyone gathered in the conference room, where we spent time singing songs for the Lord, and the kids prepared a program, the leaders put on skits, and of course the Word was preached. But special meetings took place after the parents had put their kids to bed. We gathered again. These were parties for chatting. Sometimes we laughed a lot, sometimes we sang spiritual Christian songs. At the time of these meetings we heard testimonies about hearts and families the Lord had healed. All of this was time for evangelism.

Even the weather in this camp was ideal. Usually at this time of year (end of August) there are rains and falling temperatures in the mountains. But not this time. The weather was as if I had ordered it. If we had rafting on a day, then it was sunny and hot. If we went hiking in the mountains, there was a light breeze and slightly cloudy, but not so much that the clouds covered the mountains. If our plans called for a water day, then God sent a warm afternoon right at the time for water games.

But the thing that really made me glad was that we could really get to know these families of children who come to our meetings. About 10 days after returning home, we had a big picnic at our home. We had 40 people. We continued our wonderful fellowship.

Some people began to visit worship services after the camp. Every Sunday while we had children's club for the kids other Christian sisters started women's meetings and several people from camp began attending those. There are women who don't come to church but come to these classes. Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue working in hearts of these people, in their families.

Thanks be to you and to the Lord for supporting our ministry. Please pray about our wish to begin a family home group. We already have books for studying, but so far the Lord hasn't opened a way to hold such meetings. Some of the women who were in camp are beginning to get flak from their families. In general the husbands support them, but nevertheless they aren't ready

to suffer, and this holds them back.

## September

Hello, dear friends!

I'm very glad that the Lord has created possibilities for ministry. As I wrote in my previous letter, by means of camps God has given an opportunity for working with new people, and especially with families. Unfortunately, part of the people with whom we fellowship have already gone through divorce; but there are people who are ready fight for their family. On the last day of family camp we prepared a questionnaire, and one of the questions was whether they would like to begin a small group for couples or simply a home group. Almost everyone wrote that they would like such meetings. Now arose the question for us concerning our responsibility. As the saying goes, "Now the ball was in our court."

Understanding this responsibility, we began to pray and to look at various possibilities, considering how best to begin such gatherings. As always, in connection with this we faced more problems than decisions. Like usual, we didn't have enough leaders for these groups. We pondered how to organize two totally different groups. We needed a group for lonely wives (primarily for those who were divorced) and we needed a group for couples.

Before talking about groups we decided to hold a big picnic. We held it at our house. At the picnic we continued the atmosphere and dynamics of the family camp. Everyone was ready to come to this group. But then things didn't go as we had planned. Everything we had planned for organizing these two groups simply unraveled. As for the women's group, it formed all by itself, very simply and naturally. Usually after Sunday services, which end at 1:00 pm, we hold our Christian children's club. Some of the parents bring their kids to this club. Our sisters from the church also are expecting children. They met a couple times informally and understood that meeting each Sunday works out well. They worked out a program for get-togethers and are already in their second month of meeting from 2:00 to 4:00 pm as a group of women. Please pray about these meetings. We still don't have a location for that group. Right now these sisters are using a small children's room. There are 12-15 women meeting in a room that is 9 x 4 square meters. They aren't inviting newcomers because there's no room to put new people. We very much hope that after the renovations are complete in the main auditorium we'll be able to make a small room for these gatherings in the basement area.

But a totally different situation developed with the group for married couples. Several women were quite open to receiving Christ and the Gospel as the foundation for family life. We had greatly hoped that these would become the foundation for the married couples. But via various people the Devil began to attack these families. Their neighbors learned that they were coming to our meetings and began to laugh at them. Their relatives also considered it their duty to save their kin from "cultists" and started to work on the husbands with great diligence, and the husbands in turn began to keep their distance from us. If a person who is born again is oppressed for his faith, he receives support from God. But these people had only just begun on the pathway with God and weren't ready for this. Please pray for these families.

Your brother and coworker in ministry,  
Vitaly Bilyak from Ternopil

