



The Bilyaks

2nd Quarter Report, 2017

April

Peace to you, dear friends, brothers and sisters, coworkers of the BIEM mission!

In this letter I would like to tell about the opportunity to evangelize on Mothers Day. As you know, we have worked with children for a long time, as well as with teens and young adults. Very often it turns out that parents are ready to let their children attend camp with us, but nothing more. When we invite them to a children's meeting or a teen club, the parents don't give permission. They don't want them to become Baptists. For a long time we have prayed for a breakthrough in this barrier. But this is complicated, because people are very watchful. Orthodox priests frighten people. They label this "changing faith." And changing faith is, to them, the greatest sin. Some priests threaten people, saying that if anyone from their family changes to another faith, then they will not perform the rites of baptism, weddings, and especially will not perform a funeral rite. In our culture these are very serious arguments. Seeing and hearing such a situation, we try to use every opportunity to reach not only children and youth, but whole families. Realizing that Mothers Day was approaching, the leaders of the children's ministry and the kids prepared a holiday for moms. After the Sunday worship service, we brought tables into our meeting hall. Even more, one of the young ladies invited the teens to come on Saturday, and in the church kitchen they made tasty desserts for this holiday. When the preparations were completed, the moms and families took their places at the tables. Some families came in full force. With some children there was only a mother. There were more than 50 parents. Many of these people had never before entered the church. And the fact that they came is already a victory.

There was a very emotional program. There were contests for children and parents, children told poems, sang songs. During many moments, one could see tears of happiness in his eyes. A special moment was a contest among children, when it was necessary to give a description (describe the nature) of their mother. Some children were so persuasive and sincere that it was very touching. Maybe they've never told their moms before, how they appreciate them. We were very touched that we were able to help the atmosphere of love that we receive from God to spread from the walls of the church. We were very glad that it was in the church "New Life" that the Word of God was fulfilled, written in the last verse of the Old Testament. "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers."

We are very glad that our ministry became for them a point of fellowship. If someone had thought previously that the church wanted to pull their kids away from them, well, after such meetings the parents understood that the church and God wish, to the contrary, to orient the hearts of the children to their parents. When the program ended, no one wanted to go home. There was much unofficial fellowship, photo sessions, and parents were coming and expressing thanks to us for this holiday.

We sincerely hope and pray that in the future they will all (children and parents) know and understand that God extends hope for every family. They don't know for sure that if they allow God to be their Lord, they will be blessed!

Pray, please, concerning people drawing nearer through the New Life church. Lately more people have been coming to church, but there are many obstacles on the pathway to God. Many are not prepared to be decisive. They are not ready to make up their minds and repent and be baptized. Many simply visit. They like the church, the people, and the sermons. But they, like in the store, use what they need but do not accept what might cause them discomfort.

May

Holiday of the Family

Hello to you, friends and coworkers of God!

In this letter I would like to share with you a special blessing in which God granted us the honor of taking part. We always remember that we have a large ministry team—that is YOU. Therefore I want to share some news with you.

In May, right after Mothers Day, about which I wrote in the previous letter, there are two weeks used to celebrate family. Many social organizations and churches try to use this week to focus attention on the family. Some hold parades or family festivals. For some years already we have thought it would be excellent if we could utilize this time to get acquainted with families in our area. But because our church is young and small, it's hard for us to do advance planning since such grandiose plans depend very much on our modest resources. More often, it turns out that we hold several projects using our real human and financial resources. That's how it turned out with this holiday too. Three weeks beforehand, we reached a concrete decision of what we could do. People we have; we needed resources. I wrote a letter to Samuel Slobodian and received a favorable reply from the BIEM mission, which added finances to our human resources. We began to prepare.

We counted the costs and considered the possibilities. Here is what happened. We were very pleasantly surprised that not only church members but unsaved people who had been attending offered to help with preparations. Even the men at the Rehabilitation Center wanted to take part in the holiday preparations.

One person prepared an advertisement, which we duplicated and pasted up around the area. Someone had the idea to use costumes. And it so happened that when young people in costumes of different little animals went to give out invitations, they

were invited to kindergartens and classes, and thus they gave an idea of the atmosphere of the future holiday even before it began.

For location, we decided to use the playground of the neighboring school. Since our goal was to become acquainted with families in our micro-region, this was the best option. The holiday lasted two days: Saturday and Sunday. I will hurry to say that the best and most productive day was the first one (Saturday), since it rained on the second day, and fewer people showed up.

On the first day we had around 350 people, and about 200 on the second day. The playground was divided into many different zones. Each one featured its own attraction.

The Number 1 favorite zone was "Cotton Candy." As it turned out, this was quite a cheap and tempting point. We borrowed from another church a machine that makes sweet cotton "wool," and for both days it took us slightly more than 33 lbs. of ordinary sugar. But the children and parents were very happy. They had never eaten free cotton candy. Usually in holiday parks you have to pay for such a treat, but here it was free.

The children enjoyed very much the booth where our people did face paintings. They had the chance to choose an illustration, and our youth drew them. There was always a line waiting at this zone.

For couples, we had special and romantic tables for conversation. Our leaders had prepared boxes with questions about the family that couples could ask each other. It was very nice to see how they talked. From the outside, we could sometimes even observe a certain intensity in the conversations, but it was good that when they ended the conversation they were both happy.

As stated, one of the goals of this holiday was to get to meet families and get addresses so we could send them different information and make friends with them. We thought of different options, but decided that the photo zone would be the best solution for this. We have a man attending the church who is a professional photographer; he agreed to take pictures of families for free. Our sisters prepared a special, romantic photo set. I ended up having to do some design elements of this project. When families were photographed, we gave them a questionnaire in which they could leave their e-mail and phone number. Then, when the photos were ready, we called everyone and had their photos ready for pickup.

In addition to Christian music, contests, trampolines, large soap bubbles, and hotdogs was the chance to talk with each family and gift them a children's Bible or children's New Testament.

Pray please that God would work in these families, that they would know Jesus Christ as their Savior, that God would bring to the church not just individuals, but whole families. Healthy Christian families – these are future ministers and good leaders of different ministries. In our small church there are industrious, dedicated brothers and sisters, but we are few and we need more people dedicated to God to expand His Kingdom in our district, city, and to the end of the earth!

Also pray for our family. For my health and for that of Katya, my wife. We also need to trade in our car. We use our vehicle primarily for ministry. We bought it used

over 5 years ago, and lately it has started breaking down more frequently. Constant repairs are costing us too much money.

June

Hello, brothers and sisters!

As many of you already know, two and a half years ago a great tragedy occurred at our Rehabilitation Center—a huge fire. The house for living quarters burned completely. At the time, this was a source of anguish and grief. But merciful God comforted us. This came as special comfort through many people, through you! First, we saw the hand of God in protecting, for none of the 7 men living in the house that night suffered. In an amazing way, God woke one of the men there.

For these past two years, God has led us in an amazing manner. The fire happened in autumn, and we're concerned that if the rainy season began, we would not be able to transport construction material for rebuilding. We considered the possibility that we would not have enough money for reconstruction. And God answered our needs all this time.

At one point, a dispute arose with the unsaved construction workers. I had to fire them because they were smoking in the property of the Rehab Center and in the house, even though by contract it had been agreed that they wouldn't. And at that moment God brought Igor to rehabilitation. He is a specialist in construction. And almost all the final work was done by him or under his direction.

On June 20 we held the post-fire official re-opening of the Center. As it turned out, none of the Sundays suited us for celebrating the occasion. That left just working days. We decided that if we were to hold an evening celebration with a special worship service, that would be a good change of pace. Joining us for the holiday would be Sam Slobodian, his wife Amy, and BIEM's director in Ukraine, Eugene Buyko. In addition, Sergey Skripnik and his wife Victoria joined us; they are missionaries who work in the far south of our region.

Based on previous experience with special meetings held on work days, we assumed that if we got 30 people to come, then that would be good. But here, too, God did a miracle—over 60 people attended. They were all people from the church, including unsaved who visit regularly and even some brand-new people. For all of us, this was a testimony to God.

We held the official part in the upstairs of the house, which had been restored. There used to be a small low roof that burned down. After the fire, we optimized and re-planned this house a little. If previously we could take a maximum of 7 people, now if the Lord sent them, we could accept up to 20 people. In the attic is a wonderful large living room. If necessary, we can use it as a class or a dining room. This time it was a room of prayer and worship in which more than 60 people were accommodated.

The guests shared testimonies and their wishes. We were able to sing songs for the glory of the Lord. Then there was a prayer of blessing. It so happened that we had 4 ordained pastors attending this meeting. We prayed with a prayer of blessing.

Interesting was the testimony of Andrei the minister of the rehabilitation center. He brought with him a whole pile of some leaves. When he shared his testimony, he said that all these leaves represent prayer requests about which they had prayed at the Rehab Center. It is remarkable that almost all those needs have been supplied. He spoke of both spiritual and material needs.

After all these things, we were able to see photos from the life of the Rehab Center. It was wonderful to see familiar faces. It was especially pleasant to know that many of those who passed through our program now live a new life with Jesus Christ. There was also something sad in these photos. Some of our rehabilitants are no longer alive – their lives were cut short in sin. They were people who left rehabilitation. Such stories were a special warning for rehabilitants, as well as a motivation for all who are involved in the Rehab Center. We are somewhat more aware of our responsibility for every person, whom God brings to the Center.

This celebration ended with a marvelous dinner. Even those who usually do not eat after 6 pm, could not resist. Brothers from the Rehab Center fried meat on the grill, and the sisters prepared some dishes and brought them with them. They cooked something on the spot.

Such holidays are a great blessing for us. It was an opportunity to once again see the greatness and care of God.

After that, we thanked God and everyone who took part in the restoration of the house, I want to thank you too! Friends, thank you for being together, not only in joy, but in your concern! Thank you for praying for us and for our ministry! Thank you for supporting us with resources! Please continue to pray for the service of the Rehabilitation Center. We pray that the Lord will give us more leaders of this ministry. The number of people we can really accept actually depends on this.

With gratitude and joy,
Your brother,
Vitaly Bilyak

