



The Bilyaks

3rd Quarter Report, 2017

July & August

Greetings to you, dear friends!

I would like to share with you the blessings of summer. Usually, when we talk and think about the summer period, we plan on ministering via camps. Practice has shown that this is the best period for evangelism and to work with new people.

Ukraine, as you know, is in a permanent crisis. Usually a crisis is seen as something short-lived. But not in Ukraine, and it's sad. I realize that already for ten years, when we talk about camps and the need for assistance in this project with those who support us with finances, we cite the same logic: "Most people in our country cannot afford to allow their children and their children to go away on trips."

And, of course, this opens up the possibility for the church, you and us, to minister to our society, which is weary from the drawn-out crisis. This year the Lord limited us a little in the possibilities of holding camps. Although in past years we held summer camps in addition to a children's camp, and in the past year a family stationary camp, then this year we were able to hold only a day project and a youth tent camp. It was a difficult decision. Concerning a stationary camp in general there could be no question, because a camp for 50-70 people costs around 5000 - 7000 thousand dollars, depending on the number of children. The family camp was cheaper for us, because we usually offered to pay the way of adults, and we paid for the children (that is, together with you). And this was a realistic amount for an average family with 2-3 children. But this year we did not have the opportunity to help families in this way. Of course, there are some families that could pay for adults and children, but not more than 20% of them. If we had a camp only for such people but did not take poorer ones, we would have lost more than gained.

Pray please about the possibility of holding at least family camp next year.

As for the extreme youth camp, it was a time blessed by God spent in fellowship and rest with 40 people. Two-thirds of the people were unchurched. We do not say unbelievers. Some of these people were very religious. But at the same time they do not know God personally.

Keeping with tradition, we camped in the Carpathians. What was special about this camp for us was the fact that for the first time after many years of doing this we conducted such a camp independently. In past years we have rented everything for the camp. But as we counted the cost, we saw that rental fees for tents, sleeping bags, catamarans for rafting, dishes were not cheap. We felt that if we

could buy these things, then in 2-3 years we could pay off completely the price of all these things. Therefore this year we purchased new tents, sleeping bags, three catamarans, and everything necessary for their use (paddles, life vests, and helmets). We borrowed a few dishes from friends. For the campground, we rented a beautiful and comfortable territory.

In setting up the camp, we were helped by men from the rehabilitation center. They arrived a day earlier and put up all the tents and the kitchen. And as soon as we arrived with campers the next day, everything was ready, and the rehab center men left for home. At the end of camp, the rehab center men arrived to dismantle everything, and the youth left. This also enabled the men from the Center to serve in this ministry.

Preparing the base for the camp is, of course, important. But for me the question of people is more important than material issues. We prayed that the Lord would send young people who would be open to receive the Word of God. We knew some of the youth who went with us. They are not yet saved, but came to our youth and teen meetings. The social services office recommended some of the young people. They were children from problem families. All these youth were important to us. We understood that it was our responsibility to show them the love of God.

The program of the extreme camp is always simple. The camp is based on extreme sports and recreation. First of all, we begin with a raft trip down a mountain river. It always generates a lot of positive emotions, unifying us leaders with the youth. This makes it possible to serve them. To teach them, show patience, and explain by example that there are certain laws that need to be taken into account and recognized. In addition to rafting, the hike to one of the peaks was very satisfying. The ascent was 6 hours, and the descent took 5 hours. The fatigue was great, but the landscapes that open at that height compensated for all the weariness.

However, it was the morning and evening programs that made this camp special, because these were times of meeting with God. On the property there was a place where we built a fire. The meetings started with a fun program; then there were songs and every evening, a testimony. It is always interesting for young people to think: Why am I what I am? Why do I serve God? How am I different from you? These are the questions that young people could ask and receive answers. It is interesting that they listened to the testimonies very carefully. Then in the reviews the youth always noted that these were special moments: to hear how God worked in the life of a young person. People especially listened, because they had experienced something similar, since they were from an underprivileged family, or perhaps because they, too, had lost a mother. Thus, God became not just the subject of the next preaching session, but a Person capable of changing life.

Of course, there were prayers of repentance, prayers for relatives. But a special moment for me was the opportunity to observe a beautiful scene. In the last days we saw one girl sitting and reading the New Testament, which we had given to all participants of the camp. It was free time. On the property, the Internet worked and many youth got alone with their phones in free time. But her choice was to spend time with God. When you see that, you know that such a picture is worth any money and effort.

Pray please, that the sown Word would do its job in the hearts of the youth!

After the camp, we had a project called "Choose Life." This is a special project; it gives an opportunity to serve children and youth in the area where our church is located. If we extend the camp to the forces of our church and youth from the church, then we have a bigger team for the project. Young people from different Baptist churches in Ukraine joined our young people. These youth always inspire me. Most of them work, study, and take part in the project as they pay the registration fee, plus all transportation costs associated with being in the project.

The project itself includes 3 parts. Every morning we had a children's day camp. Most of the children were from our district. The camp was held at the local school. The first couple of days we had fewer children, only half of the number that came later, which was 80 to 100 children. Our goal in holding this camp was not so much to bring the children to repentance, but to get to know these children, to meet their families, but of course also to tell them the Gospel and suggest to them repentance.

But in our culture, repenting does not mean accepting Christ and changing one's life. Even from childhood, people are accustomed to going to church for confession. If you ask the children in a camp who would like to ask God for forgiveness, most children will raise a hand. That's because in the Orthodox Church they are accustomed to repentance. But if, you ask, who would like to repent and invite Jesus Christ into his life, there will be very few who want to do that. It is very difficult to explain to people the matter of "salvation by grace." The main idea of orthodox Christianity boils down to the fact that it's necessary to live in such a way that good things outweigh the bad, and then maybe you will end up with God. Most people perceive repentance as another one of these "good things." They even have the expression "begging God for forgiveness," as if forgiveness and salvation depended on the number and length of one's prayers of repentance. Pray please about our ministry with children. They are already confused from a young age by the doctrine of salvation by doing good works. And please pray for the children's ministry leaders.

And the third part was a youth evangelism outreach in the park. In the very center of the central park, we put up a volleyball net provided last year by the BIEM mission. It drew people. While part of the team played volleyball, the other part of the team sang songs and distributed tracts and New Testaments. There were several small teams of 2-3 people who walked around the park and invited people in order to tell them the Gospel. Of course we again faced the problem of people not understanding the essence of the Gospel message. It was very encouraging when people who were looking for God were disappointed in their abilities and their "good deeds."

After this outreach, around 10 pm we crammed into my minivan (11-13 people) and were tired, but the happy workers went home for a late dinner.

In addition to the opportunity to evangelize and serve through this project, we are acquiring friends. Many visiting leaders become our prayer partners. They come to visit, or we call them.

Pray please about the camp season in 2018. We already understand that we do not have the resources necessary for the camps. Pray for leaders for the camp ministry. During the summer we all get very tired, because the church is young and

small. Many leaders participate in several ministries, and this wears them down and can create difficulties.

We are very pleased that we can collaborate with you in such ministries. It always encourages us that we know we have a great team in ministry. Please give thanks to everyone who prays for the outreach of the camps and who supports these projects financially.

September

Hello, dear friends!

I receive a great blessing and pleasure from the chance to glance backward and see God's working in the past month. This is what I'd like to share with you. We're very thankful to God for each of you, for your open hearts and for the prayers and support.

September was a very busy month, like all of life in recent times. Various projects, groups, counseling meetings... But in the last few months, I have had the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with new converts and some sisters who were preparing for baptism. Lesson by lesson, meeting after meeting, we progressed to the finish. It was evident that people were concerned because they understood that baptism was approaching. They were all determined. Why do you want to be baptized? "I want to fulfill the will of God; I want to serve Him all my life!" This is the most pleasant thing that a minister can hear. I thought about how triumphant such a statement sounds in the spiritual world. New people, new servants of our Lord, new soldiers in the army of ministers.

I held a meeting with the church. The purpose of the meeting was to let the church get acquainted with the future members of the church family. We had 6 candidates. And they all received the church's blessing for baptism.

A date for the baptism was appointed. Usually, we try to plan our baptisms for any time that isn't in summer. Summer is always a difficult time because of various summer projects. We designated this baptism for September. It turned out that our brothers Kevin Gaugler and Jeff Straub from the United States were planning to come to Ukraine.

We thought it would be wonderful to invite friends of the church to be with us for this special day. When we went to negotiate for the rent of the swimming pool where we usually baptize, we discovered that we had a serious problem. The pool was under major reconstruction and was closed. And then we had an idea. I had seen someone use an ordinary portable swimming pool for a baptism. Why not do the same? We couldn't do near the church, because it is the center of the city and we are in a multi-storied building. But we had wonderful territory at our rehabilitation center.

That's what we resolved to do. With the support of friends from America, we purchased a swimming pool. A lot of people attended. There were about 80 people. Although it was a Saturday, this did not prevent people from sharing the joy of redeemed people. All parts of the holiday we spent outdoors. God sent wonderful weather. A few words about baptism, songs sung to a guitar, and keyboard, the

baptism, a sermon by the guest preachers, followed by the first communion of those baptized, then a prayer of blessing over the baptized—everything outdoors.

A special personal joy was baptizing our daughter Karina. She used to ask questions about baptism from time to time, but then there was a period of without questions. Then, 2-3 weeks before the baptism, she asked about the possibility of her being baptized. She had already made a decision. We were very happy and supported her in every possible way. She endured all the material of the classes before she was baptized. When she had questions, she approached and we discussed it. She is 14 years old and very active in the church. On the one hand, we are happy, because for us it is a great hope that we will gain workers from the children who grow up in the church. On the other hand, we are concerned that she not be disappointed or burned out. Pray for the new brothers and sisters. There are other people in the church who have already repented and are thinking about baptism. Pray that they would overcome the pressure of the world, the pressure of relatives, their pride...

If we consider the baptism, there's an interesting observation: 3 people were from among the youth and 3 from the rehabilitation center. In thinking about it, I realized that our results are similar to business. Where you invest is the place from which you gain an increase. Last year we were very worried about the youth and made many efforts to develop the ministry of the rehabilitation center. We are very grateful to God for the ministers (leaders) of these ministries. Although it has been easier obtaining leadership for the rehab center, we've had difficulties with the youth. There was no youth leader, and I had to handle this ministry. Although my daughter Karina has already started to attend youth meetings, I had to arrange all my other commitments and ministries in order to engage in youth work. Literally this month, a young brother came to us from eastern Ukraine and took on the youth ministry. Pray for the work among the youth and about the youth ministry team, for the youth coordinator. Pray also for the development and growth of the ministry of the rehabilitation center. At the moment, the premises allow for about 20 people, yet our budget can hardly manage 5-6 people.

With best wishes, your brother and fellow worker in the Lord,
Vitaly Bilyak



Camping in Western Ukraine



Following the Lord in baptism!

