



The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

3rd Quarter Report, 2020

July

Hello, dear friends, coworkers in our mutual ministry of evangelism.

In my previous letter I asked you to pray concerning our summer projects, about the camps. Today, on August 28, all three of those projects are behind us, and I want to write a separate letter about how each one is a miracle from God and by His mercy. This is a testimony of His working.

One thing that the quarantine taught us was to stop taking each new day in ministry for granted. Each camp took place with concerns and prayers.

The project called “Choose Life” was a time of intensive evangelism for all age categories. In the beginning, we had planned to hold a big day camp for children in June, but at that time we still had a strict quarantine in place. One of our brothers suggested a change— instead of holding a day camp we could have the “Choose Life” project instead in July. By that time, a lessening of the quarantine was starting.

The main question was how to use the children’s playground (hold a mini camp for 3 hours)? The city mayor said that small groups of up to 30 people could gather outdoors in fresh air. In this, we saw an opportunity. If that window of opportunity existed, we decided to use it. So, we decided that if more than 30 children show up, then we will divide them into groups of 30 kids. At that time, nobody in the city was coordinating any sort of gathering. We were concerned that there might be possible problems from the police or that parents might react negatively.

At the beginning of July, people were very frightened. We prayed about all of these matters. Then we began to think of how it would look if one of the leaders got sick and we became a source of spreading the virus. We prayed once again.

When the time for the project arrived, in addition to our youth group, brothers and sisters from other cities and churches in Ukraine came to us. We ended up with a team of 20 young people. This was terrific. After months of quarantine



and the church's being in isolation, these were our first guests. The project hadn't yet started, but we were already rejoicing and being encouraged.



On the first day of this day camp, about 80 children showed up at the play area. Toward the end of the week, we were getting over 100 kids. There was no problem with the police. To the contrary, the children's parents were very thankful that we were doing something for their children. During the children's camp, at the stadium where we gathered each day, there was a group of parents. They were strolling with their little children while

their school-age kids participated in our program. The parents simply observed. On the last day, this group of parents amazed us. They brought 2 large cakes for the leaders. They thanked us for the time and energy we had expended on behalf of their kids. They told how they had already been watching our church for several years. We've begun to pray for this group, that they will decide to fellowship more closely with us. We made one attempt—we invited them to our family camp, but evidently, they're still not ready for close association with us.

However, the "Choose Life" program is more than just time on a playground. After the day camp, the youth running the program took part in social projects. They cleaned up the area around the church, and they mowed the grass at the school and along the streets. This was a testimony for our neighbors. The mass media have painted an picture in Ukraine that churches are places that try to lure in people who are needed by the church, but our actions showed the opposite. A number of neighbors came over to thank us for the work we'd done to spruce up our street. For the youth of our church, this was a good lesson. They saw that it's possible to glorify God in more ways than by singing songs in church.

Toward evening, the youth went out to evangelize. They divided into two groups. One group headed to the school stadium, because many local youths hang out there in the evening. They played with them—soccer, volleyball—and sang Christian songs, got acquainted, and of course shared the Gospel.

The second group headed to the park, which is nearby, and there they gave out New Testaments and evangelized.

After a week of the project, in addition to the 100 kids who attended day camp, the Gospel went out to over 200 other people, either one-on-one or in small group settings. Some people prayed the prayer of repentance, and others asked that we pray for them. Some said they will begin to read the New Testament.

Friends, pray please for those people who heard the Gospel, that the Lord will continue working in their hearts, so that the Word that was sown will grow and bear fruit for the Lord.

Thank you for the support for our ministry. We are grateful to God for each of you who pray and give of our means for the camp ministry in Ukraine.

With best wishes,

Your brother and coworker in evangelism,

Vitaly Bilayk



August

Dear brothers and sisters,

I'm glad for a chance to write you about a miracle from this summer—our Extreme Christian youth camp in the Carpathian Mountains.

As was true with all of our plans for this summer, preparations for the extreme camp went through the filter of the quarantine's limitations. This was the outcome of faith and of common sense. We received some news from that village in the mountains where we were supposed to hold our camp. A month before the camp, the owner of the property where we usually hold the camp and his son fell ill from Covid-19. Someone came and said, "It's necessary to cancel the camp." Others, to the contrary, were more optimistic and were for the camp proceeding as planned.

Time drew closer to the beginning of our camp time. Everything was ready. However, there was a last trial. One week before the beginning of camp, the authorities placed our city in the red zone. This suggested that buses would not be permitted to leave the city. Therefore, it was possible that our bus load of campers would not be allowed to leave the city. Passenger trains no longer stopped at our train station. People were outraged by such a decision by the

authorities. The city mayor supported the people, and the authorities' decision was ignored. Our departure wasn't hindered.

Like usual, the day before the youth arrived, the brothers of the church and I traveled to the mountains in order to set up the tents and to prepare everything for the beginning of camp. This avoids wasting camp time on preparations. Everything proceeded in order and according to plan.

This camp turned out to be special in various ways. I've already mentioned its preparation and risk of being cancelled. The list of youth who signed up for it changed. In one moment, someone would cancel his registration because his parents feared contracting the virus. Others might cancel registration because they had come into contact with someone sick and feared spreading the illness to others. But not one of our team got sick. All of the leaders were healthy, and all who came were protected by the Lord. In the end, new youth signed up, which filled all the vacancies left by the cancelations. Out of 45 campers, half of them were unchurched people in need of salvation.

This was a special time. We have organized many camps, and everyone noticed that this camp was a special blessing. There was a peaceful atmosphere. There were no conflicts among the campers. We had good conversations. There weren't any youth who tried to change a serious conversation into a joke. When we spoke seriously, there were thoughtful comments and answers. This was a multi-faceted camp. We had prayed for people with whom God is working,



and to our camp came youth of various ages and various professions. We had medical workers, teachers, college students, and high school students. One fellow is the son of a priest, and he graduated from an Orthodox seminary. We had many testimonies in this camp. Nearly every evening we heard salvation stories from people's lives. Of course, this was an evangelistic camp. Each day, the Gospel was shared clearly.

Every day we felt God's hand and His care. Even the unsaved kitchen workers, whom we had hired from among the local women,

noticed the divine support. They have been observing us for four years already. When people began mentioning the possibility of rain on the day when we were supposed to go hiking in the

mountains all day, one of these women said, “Each year when you come, God gives you the exact kind of weather you need.” And God didn’t let us down this year. We didn’t change any plans. The hike took place on the day we had planned for it back at home in Ternopil. We rode 40 minutes by bus to the place where we set out on the hike. While we rode, rain fell. But while we climbed for 5 hours into the mountains and descended again in 4 hours, we didn’t need to use our raincoats or to turn back because of rain. All of the campers saw how miraculously God cared for us. Nobody got sick during camp, and we had no injuries, neither on the hike nor when we went rafting on the mountain river. God’s protecting hand was over us the whole time.

The main time every day was the evening gathering around the campfire. It was the culmination of each day. Besides the individual conversations, this is where we heard testimonies plus songs of praise, and the sermon was especially important. Each evening we had an invitation to repent. There were campers who decided to change their lives. Some made very specific decisions. Others asked questions in personal conversations. On the last evening we gave a special invitation, and a few more campers prayed the prayer of repentance.



Friends, pray together with us for these new believers. We really hope that the Holy Spirit will continue working in their hearts. The youth have already held a post-camp get-together, and most of those who had been in camp attended it. This past Sunday, some of those who had been in camp came to church.

We thank you that, thanks to your prayers and the financial resources, we were able to hold this camp.

With best wishes,
Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Vitaly Bilyak

September

Dear friends, hello! I'm glad to share with you some news from our family camp, which took place August 17 – 22.

For several summers in a row, we have held family camps. Previously, we held children's camps. This is much more expensive and more complicated from the standpoint of organizing and demands on the team. About 6 years ago we decided to hold a camp for both parents and their children combined. The result surprised us. When we hold such a camp, each time we see God's working and His care.

In the first place, a family camp provides an opportunity for us to reach the entire family with the Gospel immediately.

The parents and their children hear the Gospel presented together. When we hold a camp for children, we always have the problem of wondering how to get to know the parents. We say that this is an evangelistic camp. So, we strive to get at least 50% of the people to be those who don't attend church.

When we open registration for family camp, all believers except for our camp team

must wait to see whether there will be room for them. Only toward the end of the registration period, if there is room, do we open it up for believers to register. That's how it was this year.

However, such camps are needed not only for families from the world. They are especially valuable for several families in the church that are going through a crisis. Last year, we had a family on the edge of divorce. They were at the point where they practically didn't speak to each other. In going to camp, they were simply doing a favor for friends. During the combined teaching time, the Holy Spirit began to touch their hearts. They spent time talking with the pastors in the camp, and in that camp their healing began. In camp this year, they testified of how God healed their marriage.

Several unchurched families are not yet ready to come to home groups or to a worship service, but they joyfully come to camp, where we can fellowship with them. The Christians from our church invite their unsaved relatives.

We had around 80 people in this camp. There were 19 couples and 5 single parents with children.

The theme of the camp was "A Blessed Heritage." We discussed the rearing of children.

The motto for the camp was a paraphrase of Ephesians 6:4, "Parents, rear your children in the teaching and edification of the Lord."



During these days, the Gospel sounded forth very clearly. We spoke on how parents, first, are in need of being born again, and then they will have something to offer to their children. We raised the topic of prayer and fasting and taught about sound doctrine regarding prayer, which was very important for people from an Orthodox background.



Beginning with the very first family camp, we realized that a special time for parents begins after the children lie down to sleep. We decided to use this time for special meetings with parents. When the children went to bed, the parents gathered for fellowship. We drank tea, enjoyed snacks, and talked. To relieve any tension from the air, first we began with a game. After that we always have a serious time. Stories from life were particularly valuable. In the church, we call such stories “our testimony.” After camp,

we suggested to everyone that they fill out an evaluation sheet, and in the spot where we asked what they appreciated most about these evening conversations, the majority wrote that it was these testimonies. This was very touching. Sometimes somebody would quietly wipe away a tear, because something had touched their soul.

On those forms, a number of people wrote that they had decided to start reading the New Testament. Others wrote that they had decided to attend a home group and worship services in the church.

A week after the camp, we invited the whole church to a picnic. Usually we have such gatherings at the rehabilitation center, but this time we decided to hold it on the playground of the school near the church. At this post-camp gathering, we had about 50 children and an equal number of adults. We also had unchurched families from the family camp.

Brothers and sisters, thank you for your participation and assistance in making possible our summer projects, the camp ministry in Ukraine. Without your support through finances, many families could not pay the full cost of camp and would not hear the Gospel. Thank you for praying for us. Please continue to pray for the salvation of families, and for the repentance and baptism of those who already fellowship with us.

With good wishes,

Your brother and coworker in the work of the Gospel,

Vitaly Bilyak