



**The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine
3rd Quarter Report, 2021**

July

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

We are thankful to the Lord for each of you, for every worker of the mission, for volunteers, and for those who pray, for those who sacrificially give toward various ministries, for those who take an interest and offer advice.

In this letter I'd like to tell about a special ministry—the extreme Christian camp in the Carpathian Mountains.

Summer always provides an opportunity to evangelize about Jesus Christ through camp ministries. On the one hand, summer is the culmination of various ministries. On the other hand, summer is a beginning; it's new opportunities, new acquaintances, new perspectives, and new plans. Summer—in ministry it gives a particular grade to the work done all year. If you served well, fellowshiped with people, built relationships, and witnessed about Jesus Christ—then you'll have people that you can invite to camp, you'll have people with whom to fellowship in camp, there will be people to whom you can tell the Gospel. Yet, summer ministries are also opportunities to get acquainted with new people. They are good chances to minister to new people, to recall forgotten individuals and to renew contact with them. One way or another, summer ministry provides enormous openings for the Gospel.

The youth ministry in our church is one of the most dynamic and developing ministries. This ministry never stops. They have no vacation. One season simply gives way to another. The season of home groups and youth meetings that are held from September to May morphs into camp ministry. Then the camp ministry transitions into the season of home groups and youth meetings.

Before this summer, our youth were greatly concerned about the people who would be going with them to camp. There is always the risk of taking along people who are not interested in the Gospel and not interested in serious things of life, people who generally cause problems for the team and the campers. But fortunately, or unfortunately, we do not see the hearts of the young people who want to go with us. Therefore, our youth undertook very seriously their preparations for camp. They prayed a great deal for the upcoming camp. They conferred together and thought through various possibilities concerning how to maximize taking to camp not simply people who want a good vacation but those with whom the Lord is working.

People with whom the Lord is working—this is always the most promising category—then you can say with certainty that we are coworkers with God.

The Lord answered our prayers. There were people registering for camp that you could boldly describe as people sent from God. Two weeks before camp, the list of campers began to change. Some removed themselves from the list; others came along and wanted to go. As a result, the camp filled up. We had 40 people. Half of them were people who needed to get their relationship with the Lord in order. Some heard the Gospel clearly for the first time there. Others had already heard the Gospel previously but needed to get some unanswered questions clarified, to hear answers regarding complex matters. Some who came were with us for not the first time, and they also needed the Gospel and reminders of things they had already heard earlier.

On the last evenings of camp, we called these youth to make a decision. We explained to them that repentance is a conscious decision before the Lord to leave a past, sinful life and start a new life with the Lord. On these evenings we heard several prayers where young people asked God for forgiveness and for strength to begin a new life. Some did not dare to pray aloud but announced their decision to change their lives.

The camp is over. Everyone went home happy and joyful. But the youth ministry continues. Someone asked me, “Why are we doing the youth extreme camp at the end of the summer?” This is because we have a strategy: immediately after camp, we actively continue work with young people. We’ve already experienced how things go when we did a youth camp at the beginning of the summer. The weather in June is definitely better for rafting and hiking in the mountains. However, there is a problem—when the young people return home and two months pass before the start of regular youth meetings, we lose those with whom we worked at the beginning of the summer.

Please pray with us for those young people who were in the youth camp, who made a decision, for those who prayed and those who did not dare to pray but want to change something in their lives. Pray for those who, in the camp, thought that they would live for God, and were sincere but then returned to their old friends, to the university, to school, and have already begun to forget about wanting to live in a new way, according to God’s will. Please pray for the youth ministry team. Pray that the Lord will send young people with whom they can work.

Many thanks to all of you who supported the camp services. We also express thanks to two friends from America, Caileigh and Jonathan, who came and served in this camp. They made it brighter, more international, and added atmosphere as they supported the team from our church. Thank you to everyone who donated finances for this camp and prayed for it. In such moments, I clearly realize that we are one big team of the Lord's co-workers.

With best wishes for goodness and God's grace,
Your brother Vitaliy Bilyak from Ternopil

August

Greetings, brothers and sisters, friends, and workers of the BIEM mission.

I am glad to share with you new blessings in our ministry. It is a great blessing for us that we are part of a large team of people united by a single cause—to preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your support in ministry in Ukraine. Thank you for supporting camp projects in Ukraine.

As you already know, summer is always an opportunity to preach the gospel through recreation, through camps. We have used different camp formats in this ministry. But a special format that lends a particular atmosphere is family camp. When we did camps for children, we thought all the time about how to reach their parents, how to reach families. A few years ago, when we tried to hold a family camp, it was an experiment. We saw there the special opportunities that this format opens.

In summer, people are more or less free for general recreation. Not every family can afford an expensive vacation at a pricey resort. Therefore, our camps are a good alternative for families. Another hook (bait) in family ministry camp is family topics that we bring up in these camps. For example, we talk in general about the purpose of marriage, about raising children, about roles in marriage ... This year we had a theme: the five languages of love. All family topics are based on the Bible. This helps us show that the Bible is the answer to all life's questions. Everyone, both believers and non-believers, comes with pleasure to the lectures that we offer in the camps.

As we prepare for a family camp, we talk a lot as a team, with families in the church, about building relationships with new people in the camp to preach Christ. The camp itself is already a good lead and an opportunity to build relationships, even meet new people. The ideal situation is when friends or relatives with whom someone from the church has already been witnessing goes to family camp.

This camp took place in the last days of summer, right before the start of the academic year in schools and universities. This year we had a unique group, which we did not have in previous years. This time, we had only married couples, as well as a team of young people who came and ministered to the children of those couples who went with us. It was amazing! In past years, some of those who vacationed with us were single men or women with children. They were divorced, or from families where only one person of the couple could go. This time it was a blessing to work [solely] with married couples, with or without children.

In this family camp, including children, there were about 70 people. It was a great atmosphere where families not only vacationed but also listened to the truth from God's Word together.

A typical day at the camp proceeded in the following order: Early in the morning, before the children got up, the adults had the opportunity to attend morning prayer. Basically, this prayer was attended by believing families and youth. But also, those who do not go to church

began to come. They understood that, here, we are meeting with our God. This was not some kind of planned program, no one prepared a sermon. We just read the Scriptures, shared thoughts, and prayed. After morning exercises and breakfast, there was time for training. For adults, we offered a family theme; for children there were Bible lessons. After lunch to dinner, there was always a time to rest. This year, there was very little water in the river for rafting, but it was still a time when the whole family could spend time together rest, hiking, or playing camp games. After dinner, we met again in the large meeting hall, where we had an evening program. That started with games and funny skits, and then proceeded to more serious and important things. We worshiped the Lord in songs, there was time for serious skits, and there was always a sermon at the end of each evening. Every evening one of the brothers shared thoughts, themes from God's Word. Our unbelieving friends could see that, not only can a pastor who learned to preach can teach people, but a builder, engineer, or sportsman also contemplates the Truths of Scripture.

A special blessing and encouragement for us was the fact that we were accompanied by people whom we did not know, whom we met in May at the Family Holiday our church held.

Now we are praying for the opportunity to start a small group for families who were in this camp, couples who do not attend church or small groups. Please pray that such a group will become a place where people will find God, not just people, but married couples, so that Paul's words to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye will be saved, and your families," will be fulfilled.

With best wishes,

Your brother Vitaly Bilyak

September

Hello, dear friends, brothers, and sisters!

We are thankful to God for each of you for being there, for letting us tell you about our problems, for sharing our joys and victories and praying together with us.

In this letter I want to talk about what concerns me right now. It concerns organizing humanitarian shipments from America to Ukraine. As you know, one aspect of BIEM, the mission agency we work with, is the organizing and delivering of humanitarian aid. The church and I have a personal, direct connection to such work in Ukraine. We are one of the teams of missionaries who work in this capacity together with other brother missionaries. In the past several years, we have received container loads, but this time everything is different, and much more complicated.

The very preparation of the container for shipment was different from usual. This required much more time. In the past we simply counted the boxes and things that we loaded into a container and wrote them into the list. This time, every box, every bicycle, each wheelchair, each chair, had to be weighed and itemized and only then could it go into the container.

This consumed a lot of time. The container is now ready for shipping. Now the problem is the paperwork. The next step is working with the Cabinet of Ministers. Now I'm supposed to prepare a whole package of hundreds of pages with documentation. The documents must be prepared accordingly. No mistakes. The requirements concerning the documentation is constantly changing. When the documents are ready and sent to the Kabmin [Cabinet of Ministers], there will be a meeting of a special committee for humanitarian aid. It is they who will decide whether to admit the list of commodities that we provided or not. They can demand an explanation why specific items are essential. For instance, when we were working on the last shipment, they demanded a letter of explanation why we had hoes in a shipment of humanitarian aid. On another point, they asked specifically who would receive the guitars that were listed. Each individual explanation should be written up as a separate document. Many organizations in Ukraine are now refusing to accept shipments because of the huge bureaucratic system, which creates many problems.

When the itemized list is accepted as humanitarian aid, then the next stage begins—the mission in the USA will ship the load to Ukraine. Before, things were done differently. We packed a shipping container, sealed it, and then sent it to Ukraine. While the container was in transit, we had sufficient time to prepare the paperwork. But the last container got stuck due to the complications with the paperwork, which resulted in additional expenses and worries. Therefore, this time we are doing things differently.

When this shipment reaches Ukraine, a third stage will begin—working with Customs. Customs will examine the load, opening each carton (or almost every carton) and taking hundreds of photos, verifying the contents list, and possibly weighing the items. Problems can arise due to the description of the load.

After the shipment is cleared by Customs, the next step will begin—distributing the load among the recipients. You would think that this phase would be very joyful, good, and positive, but even here not everything is so simple. On one hand, the things that people in America have donated for the needy in Ukraine will finally be delivered. Those who need clothing, shoes, plates, bed coverings, wheelchairs, or furniture will receive their aid. But it's not all so simple for those who organize the distribution of this aid. Complicated reporting work still awaits them. It's fully possible that, after everything is given out, it will be necessary to sit for weeks and to work through papers, and this hinges on everything having been filled out properly when the things were given out.

Why have I written about this in such detail? I've omitted everything concerning organizing the unloading, working with brokers, preparing a warehouse and much more, because in comparison with the anxiety of the things mentioned above, those other details no longer seem important or essential.

Friends, we need your prayers. Please pray that God will send us the people we need for every step of this complicated process. In Ukraine, the human factor is always very important.

This includes the mood of the members of the commission when they handle our matter, which Customs agent we get and his mood on that day, the temperament of the people who receive the reports... All of this is always unknown. We need God to escort everything through this involved process.

Every day we encounter people in need. They request help, and we are very glad that you send this assistance for us. Unfortunately, our authorities sometimes speak and create such an impression via the mass media that it seems we no longer need such aid. However, it is very much needed because poor people are becoming even poorer.

Thank you for your support and your prayers!

With sincere gratitude and wishes for God's grace,

Your brother,

Vitaly Bilyak

Addendum

Dear friends, we have another great need. This is a new challenge for the life of the church. It is about heating in our premises. Due to the rise in prices for natural gas in Europe, and Ukraine having bad relations with Russia, this year natural gas prices for churches and various organizations have quadrupled. The church must pay four times the amount that an ordinary person in Ukraine pays for 1 cubic meter of gas. Our heating system works on natural gas. It was usually expensive, but we got along. Before winter, we tried to set aside a small supply of money in order not to freeze in winter (our winters are quite cold). Because different meetings are held in the church almost every day, we must maintain adequate air temperatures. Due to the rise in natural gas prices this year, this winter we cannot afford to turn on gas at such a price. We studied the matter of how we can save money using alternatives. The only more or less adequate answer to this question is to install three air heaters that will work down to -15°C . Two air heaters in the worship hall and one in the small meeting area, where we have many meetings. The price is \$2,700 for three heaters + \$300 for installation. We will be grateful if you can help us with this issue. Unfortunately, the church has no spare funds of its own.

Thanks for your support!

Vitaliy Bilyak from Ternopil



