



The Bilyaks in Ternopil, Ukraine

4th Quarter Report, 2023

October

Donbas – Trip 13

Did you know that some trains do not have a 13th train car? Some houses do not have a 13th floor. People in Ukraine are afraid of this number because of its connection with occult practices, as a number that brings bad luck.

My 13th trip to the East, to the front line [to share the Gospel and aid], negates such superstition.

This was the grand, God-blessed 13th trip to the front line.

“And let us not be weary in well doing,” the Apostle Paul taught the church.

There were days of preparation, teamwork to prepare food packages. More than 3700 km of road. Six nights in Dnieper. This was the longest trip of all my trips to the front line. More than 2 tons of valuable cargo. Purchasing 160 loaves of bread and three evenings of shopping at the Metro supermarket. We left Dnieper early and then hurried to return to save money for the trip the next day. We hit the road from Sunday to Monday night. Saturday evening, we returned. A week is like one day. Meetings with civilians and military personnel. Some wanted to listen, and others wanted to speak out. “When will this end?” some asked. Others were simply tiredly silent.

Our brother Andrei Eliseev, a minister at the rehabilitation center and a deacon of our church, expressed his desire to go with me on this trip. So, the road itself was already a blessing for both of us. It seems like it’s been a long time since we’ve had the opportunity to communicate for 11 hours straight.

Monday was a travel day. After lunch we bought 160 loaves of bread. Tuesday – We served civilians in 3 villages between Kurakhov and Ugledar. I’ve been to these villages before. Now they are being bombarded systematically. These are villages over which ammunition flies in both directions. The people who live here live in constant uncertainty. When ours advance, they have hope; but when things are difficult with us on the front line, they worry. There are children in these villages. I asked parents why they don’t leave with their children, why they didn’t evacuate? Their answer is, “We already tried. We left, lived for some time in the west of Ukraine, but it is very difficult, first financially. Renting an apartment is expensive, and when



you don't have a permanent job, it's almost impossible. We suffered for several months and then returned. This is reality.

We distributed 140 food packages, as well as bread, vitamins, hygiene kits, New Testaments, and "Life" calendars for 2024.



In each of the 3 villages, we met with people before distributing food. We just talked and asked them about their everyday matters. At the meetings themselves, people talked about the grace they associated with our arrival. We heard statements like, "Forty minutes ago it was very noisy here, there were incoming shells at someone's house. And now look, you've arrived; and it's become quiet..."

Each such meeting, in each village, began with preaching the Gospel. Andrei Eliseev shared with people how the Lord changed his life. People heard the story of God's action, how a dying drug addict was saved by Jesus Christ. Then everyone prayed together for the local people and the victory of Ukraine.

Wednesday and Thursday – We had three meetings with military personnel from three divisions. Most of the tourniquets we had went to Avdiivka. That's where the front is hottest. We need quality tourniquets again!

We donated 30 sleeping bags, portable gas stoves and cylinders for them, electric heaters, vitamins, 14 pairs of winter shoes, backpacks, cosmetic bags, thermal underwear, warm socks, hats, warm sweaters, uniforms, tactical gloves, hygiene products, cleaning products for our brave warriors, dishes, and 20 electrical extension cords.

As a special expression of gratitude, fruits, chocolate, goodies, and coffee were given to our defenders in each unit...

One military unit gave me a medal for dignity and patriotism. Friends, this reward is for all of us. It goes to everyone who donated, helped, or prayed. This is gratitude from the military for you. I am just passing it on. This means that we, believers, the Church of Jesus Christ were noticed at the front. We are together with our defenders. And the greatest glory belongs to the Lord!

Friday – We ministered to wounded civilians in the Kurakhovo hospital. We heard many stories of pain and loss, salvation, and God's protection. We prayed with the sick and shared the Gospel. We prepared and distributed about 40 food packages for the wounded. Everything was distributed. We had a feeling that there was not enough.

Thank you, friends, for your prayers and your active support of our ministry here in Ukraine.



God bless you!

Vitaly Bilyak, your brother and minister from Ternopil

November

I have completed my 14th trip to the front line. Most things on these recent trips are becoming routine for me. I know the road, the route, so well that I no longer need Google maps. I already know and remember the more dangerous sections of the road, sections where there are many potholes. I even know and remember all the speed cameras. However, there is always something about these trips that will never become routine—the live interaction with people. This is an opportunity to hear stories and testimonies from people, about how the Lord is working in their lives. Often these stories are told by people who are not yet believers, how they see the salvation of the Lord. Believers have stories, too, and they are also diverse. Christian soldiers talk about their challenges and share difficulties. Afterward, we pray according to these needs. Christian officers have needs that are different from those of Christian soldiers. They all need our prayers. Here are some facts, figures, and statistics from this trip:



As usual, my base in the east was Dnipro. This city is convenient for traveling, both to the Donetsk region (east) and to the Zaporozhe side (south). This time, it was like that. I went to the Donetsk region twice. Food was distributed near Kurakhovo, and I had meetings with the military in Slavyansk and again between Pokrovsk and Avdiivka. In the Zaporozhe direction I met with the military in the direction of Orekhovo.

As always, ministry to civilians was performed together with pastor Alexander Moseychuk. This time we were in the village of Andriivka, near Kurakhovo. The people in this village are very willing to listen to God's Word. There is not a single evangelical church there. This is a big village. There are many war refugees living in this village. These are mainly folk who have fled more dangerous regions but do not want to go far from home. Various ammunitions fly into this village from time to time, which makes people listen and look around.



Here, we distributed 140 food packages, hygiene kits (shampoo, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes...), bread, vitamin C + zinc, and everyone received a warm winter hat. People accepted Christian calendars for 2024 and New Testaments. As always, before we open the trailer to distribute aid, we preach the Gospel. Since it was quite quiet and calm at this time—the sounds from the front could be heard only distantly—we were able to take our time preaching. Sometimes it's the other way around: we preach in a hurry because of the proximity of shelling. Pastor Alexander maintains constant communication with people of this village. After the general meeting, we made several targeted deliveries of assistance [to particular individuals].

We gave assistance to one widow who has two children. This is not a special case; what is unique is that this widow, living in modest conditions herself, took in another widow and child from among the refugees. This woman she took in had recently become a widow when she lost her husband in the war. This is something that can be seen quite often in Ukraine: those who

have experienced grief themselves—and who often live in poverty—show maximum generosity and help to other people.

It's special to notice how people in the east of Ukraine have changed since the beginning of the war. They are trying to rebuild, not only by switching from Russian to Ukrainian, but also by trying to somehow express religiosity, which often makes you smile when you hear it. Here are a few such stories from this trip:

The female cashier got lost counting the hot water bottles [I was buying] for the military and uttered a strange prayer-exclamation: "Man, Lord, and as many as possible..." It's already traditional for me to greet young soldiers at checkpoints with the words, "Glory be to Jesus Christ!" Which is typically followed by a pause. It is clear that the man is surprised. I, too, stay silent. In response I hear not an answer, but a question: "Glory to Jesus?" You can see that the man is stumped on how to reply. That tells me this guy is not one of ours [from the West], but is from the East... You can spot guys from Western Ukraine right away; they answer automatically, often without even thinking about the words...

Once again, we are encountering people who get angry and start being rude. I had not seen such a reaction for a long time. At the bakery cash register, I needed to pay for the bread already loaded into my vehicle. I went to the cashier's window and explained to the employee that I needed to pay for the bread, which I had picked up personally. They call it "self-delivery." In response, she grumbled unhappily. I understood this woman was not happy with me, but she did her job, took my money, and handed back the receipt... I smiled and wished her a good evening... It seemed that she smiled a little in return.



Serving in the military is always unpredictable. You never know how things will turn out: How and when a soldier will be able to leave to meet up. Some soldiers are allowed to leave for an hour, while others get only 15-20 minutes. On this trip I had the opportunity to meet up with three brothers, plus their friends. They serve in different units and in different sectors of the front. There are such meetings when you not only encourage someone, but you yourself receive encouragement from the meeting, from fellowship. This time I enjoyed fellowshipping with Sergeant Alexander, serving in the Zaporozhe area. He is a young Christian who came to church shortly before the outbreak of full-scale war. That's why meetings with him are always interesting. Sometimes he has questions that he keeps aside and prepares for our meetings. Sometimes he tells me a testimony about how the Lord helps him in difficult army conditions. A few weeks before our meeting, Sasha said he had decided to make a covenant with the Lord. Here is his message about this decision: "If God preserves me and I remain alive and well, I am planning to go on vacation in April. And I want to spend the rest of my life with God. And I would really like to be baptized." This is very touching and inspiring because his message begins with the fact that it is not certain that he will live to see the day to be baptized. Immediately after his decision, I sent him preparation material, which he is now reading.

When we met this time, we had a little over an hour to talk, and this hour flew by quickly. Then I quickly unloaded the aid items that I had brought for him and his brothers, talked briefly with his friend, who had brought him in a car, and then they sped off along a country road towards the front. Our meeting had taken place at an intersection, in the middle of a field, in a relatively safe place.

This time, for the military I had 11 sleeping bags, about 20 sets of thermal underwear, medicines (multivitamins, paracetamol), fruits, apples, lemon, ginger, juice, snacks, cookies, coffee, tea, warm socks, and T-shirts. Our youth had created 50 trench candles. One unit requested chemical heating pads. I've never encountered this before. I didn't even know what it was. It turns out that this is a small pouch with a safe chemical mixture which, when interacting with air, releases heat after opening the bag. The soldiers insert these packets in their gloves and shoes when they go on duty outside. I found such pouches in a supermarket in Dnipro and bought everything they had for hands and feet. I divided it between two departments.



When I considered how I was bringing these soldiers something that warms and something that fills (food), I remembered the words of the Apostle James about some people who said to those in need, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” but did nothing about it. In our case, we literally gave something that warms (chemical heating pads, trench candles, thermal underwear, sleeping bags) and something that fills (various foods and vitamins)

Friends, thank you for your sincere donations for needs in Ukraine. Without you and your donations, we could not do anywhere near what we do now. I also thank you for your prayers and concerns for us. We feel like we are part of a big team. We praise the Lord for each of you.

Your brother,
Vitaly Bilyak

December

Trip to Donbas – 15

This trip started by monitoring the weather forecast. A few days before the planned trip, a record amount of snow fell in Ternopil. This amount of snow is not typical for late November - early December. I am not afraid of snow and winter, but there is a good reason to fear traveling on a road in such weather. In good weather, the drive takes 11-12 hours [the first day] + plus 4 hours the next day. My trailer is usually overloaded by several times. It's typical weight on such trips is more than one and a half tons. So, the weight of the car together with the cargo is more than 2 tons. The danger of traveling in winter is that I worry that when there is ice, the trailer, due to such a great weight, will begin to overtake the car or start jackknifing during emergency braking. Therefore, when planning a trip in the winter, we pray about the choice of dates and the right weather for this trip. As a rule, we choose the date 2 weeks in advance, but it is impossible to coordinate the weather, so we pray. Over the past two winters, we have never had to reschedule a trip due to bad weather. This trip was no exception. The weather in Ternopil was so difficult that this time I did not take the trailer to my home after loading it at the church, as I usually do. Instead, I left it in the city parking lot. I would never pull such a trailer to my village in such weather. My vehicle couldn't climb the hills I drive every day. Therefore, I left the house at three o'clock in the morning by car, and once in the city, I attached the trailer and hit the road.

All the road surfaces in Dnipro and Donbas were perfectly dry. Sometimes the road has been more difficult during the non-winter months than it was this time. Such things encourage

me that the Lord facilitates such trips, blesses, and paves the way. My car already has 300,000 km on it but continues to serve this purpose faithfully.

Another point to consider in preparing for the trip was bad news about the town of Novogradovka, where we were planning to go. We (Pastor Alexander Mosiychuk and I) made the decision to visit this city, Novogradovka, two weeks earlier on our fourteenth trip to Donbas. People from that city had asked Pastor Alexander for help. He told me, and we set dates. After the 14th trip, I telephoned the sisters of the church. They prepare food packages, and even before my return they began preparing for this next trip. But a few days after making this decision, Pastor Alexander called me and said that Novogradovka had been shelled. There were strikes on residential buildings. One apartment building was badly damaged. People—families, small children—had died...So, when we arrived in this town a week later, these people were in mourning. This is a small town, so the tragedy affected many. Someone's neighbors, relatives, employees, acquaintances were injured...

Usually Pastor Alexander works with volunteers—organizers, local non-church (non-believers) people. This time it was the same, but we met in the building of one of the evangelical churches of this city. The church provided the premises, and volunteers invited those in need to the church.

I once told you that our meetings with people vary. If there is shooting nearby and something explodes nearby, these encounters are brief and concise. If it was calm, we could preach for 20 minutes and calmly talk with people. The warmth of the church and the microphones gave us even more opportunities. Our meeting lasted more than an hour. In addition to me and Pastor Alexander, a military medic named Artyom had the opportunity to address people at this meeting. We had met Artyom a few weeks earlier. His native village is now under occupation, and his evacuated friends live in Ternopil. They are refugees and attend our church. When he was granted leave, he came to us. Then he returned to the front line to continue his military service. While watching the broadcast of our service via YouTube, he heard an announcement that I was going to take the gospel to Novogradovka. And his assigned location is place nearby, in one of the neighboring settlements. He contacted me and expressed a desire to minister. Since he is a military medic—an officer—he is more independent than ordinary soldiers in planning his time. The only thing we prayed for was that there would be no aggravation and shelling of his unit, that there would be no injuries or deaths, because in that case he would be urgently summoned to save lives. Therefore, through our prayers, Artyom was with us and addressed people with words of hope and encouragement. It was clear that these people were listening attentively. For many, Artyom was evidence that Christians not only perform social work, but also serve in defense of the country.

After the meeting was over, we distributed 150 food kits to the people. The local church baked a loaf of fresh bread for each of our kits. The people also received hygiene kits, Christian calendars, New Testaments, illustrated New Testaments for children, children's literature, and Christian family magazines.

The bomb that struck the apartment building I mentioned earlier is close to the church where we held the meeting. Maybe 200-300 meters away. So, we went to see the extent of the tragedy, and afterward Alexander and I visited some people in need. I left Pastor Alexander at 17:00 so that I could return to Dnipro and have time to prepare to visit the military the next day. Two hours and 40 minutes - that's how long the drive from Novogradovka to Dnipro took. During this time there were 2 air alerts in the city of Dnipro. I arrived at the supermarket during an air alarm. I waited for half an hour. The alarm ended; the supermarket opened. I quickly

grabbed everything I needed before the next air alarm. Some stores ignore the alarms, but this hypermarket stops all operations during the sirens. As soon as I loaded everything into the car—even before exiting the parking lot—another alarm.

Since I had a new Christian military acquaintance, I decided to deliver the aid through him this time to strengthen his testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ in his unit. We discussed the meeting with Artyom from the previous evening and agreed to meet in a town not far from his duty station. In this city, usually there are many military men in the stores. They come to eat in cafes, pick up different parcels at the “new post” ... Late in the evening, before going to bed, Artyom wrote me that he was changing the place of our meeting and proposed to meet in another small town, also near his place of temporary residence. From his text I realized that our meeting in that cafe, where we had planned, was life-threatening. I even made a joke, something like, “Did you find out the food there is that bad?” The real reason was different. Because Artyom is an officer, he had heard that there was an increased risk of shelling troop concentrations in the rear that day. That day, December 6, was Defenders of Ukraine Day, a holiday for all military personnel and cafes were targets for the enemy. We met at a small pizza place. I don’t like pizza, but I was glad to spend time with this brother. I heard many amazing stories, testimonies of how God was working with Artyom’s heart. Some of it was pastor talk, and I will never tell you about it. But there were also testimonies of God saving Artyom’s life and the lives of his men.

Here is one story from Artyom, which he gave me permission to tell you. That day he came back to their cantonment house after a night duty and really wanted to sleep, because he was exhausted. He was hoping to get some rest. There were other servicemen in the house, making noise and in no way sharing Artyom’s desire to sleep. It was not the first time. It had happened before. In such cases, Artyom could quarrel, demand as an officer, and enforce the silence... But this time he decided to keep quiet. He got up from his bed, took his sleeping bag and went to sleep on the floor in some closet. Because of fatigue he fell asleep instantly. Sometime later he woke up to explosions. He realized they were being shelled. He and other soldiers ran into the fields. When the shelling was over, they returned to the house. The building itself was not destroyed, but there was a lot of damage from the blast waves from the nearby hits. There was no glass left in the windows. When he returned to his room to his bed, which he tried to sleep on immediately, he saw that at the top of the bed, there were several huge pieces of glass stuck in the mattress. These glass triangles were right where his head had been when he slept. If it wasn't for the noise of his housemates, he would have been sleeping on that bed and received glass knives in his head. Artyom said that in this way the Lord taught him several lessons. A lesson about salvation and a lesson that sometimes we must receive circumstances that we don't like as from the Lord.

Friends, please remember in your prayers our Christian brothers serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is very hard for them. It is very difficult to carry God’s light, His love, the Word of God in the atmosphere of death, anger, aggression, desire for revenge. Please pray for a miracle for Ukraine that this war will end, because the news we hear does not add any optimism.

Thank you for your continued support of our ministry in Ukraine.

Your brother and co-laborer,
Vitaly Bilyak from Ternopil