



# BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL Challenger

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## Sharing Christ During Coronavirus

*Many friends of BIEM wonder how our missionaries are faring during the pandemic. Below, we share their own words (translated into English, of course). We hope this article will inform you but also guide you in prayers as these men and women share Christ.*

### Nahabino, Russia

For the first time in our lives, the church wasn't able to gather for a joyful Easter service. In our country, we've been in a state of self-isolation due to the coronavirus. A new law forbids people from gathering in groups larger than fifty people. Even though there are no strict prohibitions about going to temples or churches, most churches in the Moscow region, including ours, are holding their services online.

We've organized a group for coordinating worship services. Each Sunday, about ten people are busy in the church, participating in a service and broadcasting it for those at home. Usually it lasts ninety minutes: two sermons, a trio leading singing, a solo or vocal ensemble, and someone recites a psalm or a poem. Our Easter service was jubilant as our wind ensemble played. Part of the youth group and also some children praised the Lord.

Praise be to the Resurrected One—Jesus is worthy!

During the week, we hold a Bible study on the Gospel of Luke in small groups, as before. However, now we fellowship via the Internet. Understandably, not everyone can connect to the Internet. It's difficult for some. For them, I record a video of the Bible study, and we post these online so they can watch later.

This complicated situation has prompted us to increase the prayer life of the church. We decided to hold a 24-hour prayer vigil, asking God to use this coronavirus situation for the good of the church. We want all of the church to be awakened and walking the path of sanctification so that our relatives would be saved, and that God would send repentance to sinners during this troublesome time. We also ask God to foil the Devil's intentions against the church, and that He would give our president and leaders wisdom and care for people.

Praise God, the whole church heeded the call to prayer. We divided the twenty-four hours of the day into thirty-minute segments, which yielded forty-eight time slots. In our church, we have a little over 100 members. This way, every thirty minutes two people are praying for these requests. Everyone chose whatever time

slot they wanted. Praise God, they filled the whole schedule. Even the nighttime prayer periods were no problem. God has sent a positive inclination toward prayer into the hearts of His children. Everyone is grateful to the Lord for this ministry, because previously not everyone had prayed every day for thirty minutes. The Lord is teaching people to pray, and they rejoice in this.

*Pavel Rumachik*

### Ternopil, Ukraine

As with the rest of the world, the quarantine came upon us unexpectedly. We had planned to have a baptism. Two brothers are ready—Ruslan from the youth group and Vladimir from the Rehabilitation Center. Originally, we set the baptism date for March 29, but then moved it to April 12. Now we're simply waiting for the quarantine to be lifted.

I've noticed that it's easier for young churches like ours to adapt to the new reality. For older congregations in Ukraine, it's more difficult.

Big churches felt the awkwardness of the first Sunday of quarantine more than small churches. At first, it was forbidden to gather in groups larger than 100 people. This didn't affect us; we normally have

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Near Moscow, the Smirnov family watches Pastor Rumachik's Sunday sermon online.



Pavel Rumachik notes one plus of the pandemic: whole families are home each evening, making it easier to hold a family time of reading Scripture, singing, and praying together.

# My Grandmother

*Is there a loved one you've been praying about for a long time? Andrei Eliseev, who oversees the Christian Rehabilitation Center near Ternopil, Ukraine, shared this encouraging story.*

I'd like to share how my grandmother repented. This happened five years ago.

Grandmother's name was Nadezhda Ivanovna. You could describe her as good, orderly, educated, an interesting conversationalist, and a person who knew much interesting history. She had lived through the famine of the 1930s and later World War II.

She taught my cousin Lesya and me to work, to respect our elders, and to love our parents. Yet, despite all these positive qualities, she never spoke about God. She forbade such conversations. We were taught that there is no God. This was Grandmother's firm position....

When I was addicted and needed finances for treatment. Grandmother



helped me. However, she asked me not to tell anyone, especially not in the place where she lived.

After my rehabilitation, I lived in Ternopil and in Rovno, and sometimes I talked with Grandmother by telephone. At age 95, she remained clear-minded and was making grandiose plans for the future. Our conversations touched on topics like mankind, nature, and space. As before, Grandmother remained a very interesting conversation partner in these topics. But she still didn't want to hear anything about God. She praised me for getting clean of narcotics. She was always saying how wonderful I was. But I told her I couldn't take the credit; the Savior Jesus Christ was the Author of my good qualities.

Grandmother had always believed that only man could create his own fate. One day I posed a question that altered the course of her future: "What do you think—if we consider mankind, nature, and space, is there a creator for all of this? If so, who is it?" The next time we talked, she said she wanted to get saved!

On February 8, 2015, I drove from Ternopil to Kyiv. At that time, Grandmother was 98. I prayed first then Grandmother repeated after me a prayer of repentance. Afterward, she recalled that sometime back in childhood she had prayed to God! These were her last words to me. That's how I remember her. On February 18, Grandmother passed away.

God never forgets a prayer!

*“Reaching the world for Christ since 1981”*  
Dr. Peter Slobodian, Founder

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about seventy people. Next, new laws forbade gathering in groups greater than ten people. We adapted quickly. We organized four groups of ten people, and for the next three Sundays we held worship services in these small groups. In each group there was time for worship, and then we watched videos of our sermons over Facebook. This way, we felt united.

Weekday meetings have switched to a video-conference format. We continue our leadership studies on Mondays. The home groups also continue via online connections. Each Wednesday evening, we hold a Zoom conference for the whole

church. These two hours are a precious time of fellowship, prayer, and Bible study. Families and individuals unite through their computers, tablets, and telephones. It's special to see each other, to hear the excitement in their voices.

Following online meetings, I telephone those who weren't able to join us. One might need help with groceries. Another needs drinking water. Others need someone to pray with and encourage them.

By statistics, I see that 20% of our online viewers are unbelievers. One acquaintance who is going through a

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*In Ternopil, Ukraine, dividing the church into small groups allows a cautious approach to in-person worship.*



*Technology enables BIEM's Vitaly Bilyak to continue his leadership training based on a study of Paul's epistles to Timothy.*

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difficult period due to oncological illness watches us regularly.

Please pray that, despite the isolation, we can be salt and light for this frightened, deceived world that is locked in their own homes.

*Vitaly Bilyak*

#### **Bilgorodka, Ukraine**

As in other countries, Ukraine is undergoing complex times due to coronavirus. Educational institutions are closed, movement on the streets is limited, and many people are out of work or have gone on unpaid time off. Ukrainians worry about whether there will be money to pay for community services and whether they will have a means to feed their families.

About fifty people attend our second Baptist church in Bilgorodka. Of those, about fifteen people are elderly, or have disabilities, and need attention and support, especially during quarantine.

Some of our members suggested buying groceries for those in serious need. By God's mercy, we were able to gather funds to buy food for eighty parcels. Some funds came from our church budget. Members donated more. Also,

friends of our church gave, including the BIEM mission, for which we sincerely thank you!

Every package included a variety of foods, such as flour, sugar, sunflower oil, tinned fish, meat pâté, cookies, chocolate, and tea. Elderly and disabled believers received these parcels of food to the glory of the Creator. Some unbelievers in town also received one.

I personally received the task of delivering a food parcel to a Christian widow. When she opened the door and saw such a large package of food, she teared up. She shared how she had asked God for help. She hadn't been sure she would have enough to eat in the next few days.

A different elderly sister in difficult straits asked whether someone else might need these groceries more than she. This showed once again how the quarantine has rallied our church. Each one was thinking more about others than about self. Praise be to our loving God for that.

When a deacon delivered food parcels to needy ones in town, he saw puzzlement in their eyes. For them, his arrival was like thunder from a blue sky. They couldn't believe strangers could care and bless them that way.

For us, this act of doing good opened hearts for the Gospel and created an opportunity to fulfill the Word of God, which teaches us to love, not in words only, but also in deeds.

*Sofia Buyko*

#### **Central Asia**

Although the world remains in lock-down, the Gospel is not bound. Several weeks ago, brother River in Central Asia contacted me. He was wondering how to feed his flock and continue to reach out. Their country is severely locked down. Nobody is on the streets, so even their already outlawed underground services were impossible. Yet, through the difficulties, brother River reports, "We praise God for the trials. We have no internet, no phones, no one can be out, but we have found ways to continue meeting and evangelizing on an almost nightly basis." Over the last weeks, they have led twelve Muslims to Christ. Praise the Lord for their faithful labors. Thank you, too, for your prayers for our co-laborers. God is being glorified. His name is being magnified.

*Timur K.*

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*In Chernigiv, Lyosha Savchuk says, "To my surprise, not only our church members but other Christians and even unbelievers watch these online services. Realizing my audience has enlarged, I try to make the Gospel as clear as possible at each live meeting."*



*In their local outreach, Sergei and Vika Skripnik have provided groceries for villagers in need. Not mere social aid, each gift accompanies a presentation of the Gospel.*



*The church in Desna, Ukraine, is ideally situated to reach out to soldiers at the nearby military base. May God bring more salvation decisions among them!*



*Ministering online, Vitaly Keller met Ivan, who was stranded in Kyiv with a broken-down car. Vitaly helped with the repairs and shared Jesus while working. Ivan trusted Christ! They continue fellowshipping through online Bible studies.*

#### **...Sharing Christ** continued from page 3

#### **Desna, Ukraine**

We've all seen how hard it is to adapt in these trying times. Yet, God calls us to serve and to tell others about salvation. We can't gather in large groups, so we meet in small groups, where we study God's Word and worship our Lord in song.

On Sunday morning, we had a meeting with soldiers. We read from the Word and praised the Lord. In the evening another group came, and we dedicated that time to studying prayer, because in Mark 13:32–33 the Lord taught that we must pray and be ready to meet with the Lord. What's nice is that, due to the quarantine, many don't rush away afterward. Sometimes groups last up to four hours. This encourages me, because we can dig deeper and reflect. Each person can share his experiences as we look into the Word of God. Because of the quarantine, many are not so caught up in vain things and are willing to talk.

*Igor Fomichov*

#### **Kyiv, Ukraine**

Ukraine went on lockdown about a week after the States did. About half of the population was in fear of the virus. They stayed home all the time with rare exceptions. The other half walked along the streets freely without masks, having picnics in the parks. As of this week, most stores have reopened, and people hope to return to work next week. Public transportation is not running yet, but people with private cars help to fill that gap.

People are running out of savings and are eager to return to work. Some have been fired and need to look for a new job. Our friends in villages tell of multiple burglaries. They say many dogs have been poisoned to keep them from barking at night, when

the neighbors are burglarizing each other. The situation is much calmer in the city. We can finally leave our apartments and stroll the streets and parks at a distance from each other. We are really looking forward to engaging in street evangelism. Good weather has arrived, and we are eager to share the Good News with people.

Our entire ministry went online over the past few months. Church meetings have been held via Zoom.... We also continue our English lessons for teens from the local youth center. Thanks to Zoom, we've even had students from Russia attending our online classes. I try to sow seeds of the Gospel in every lesson with these kids.

We also decided to try an interesting idea involving a Facebook and Instagram video challenge for Christians. We launched the challenge a few weeks ago, and it has already spread beyond our church to several Russian-speaking countries. Young Christians video themselves sharing a one-minute testimony. This helps many to verbalize their personal story and to openly declare their faith to all of their on-line contacts.

*Vitaly Keller*

#### **Republic of Georgia**

Three months ago, none of us could've imagined how quickly the world would change—all because of an invisible, previously unknown virus. In a few short weeks, the coronavirus has radically revolutionized society and ministry around the world. Even the most technically stubborn among us are being forced to acclimate to new ways of communication and interaction. While we hope most of these changes are temporary, we know God is using even these events for the furtherance of the gospel, and we pray that God

would give each of us wisdom to redeem the time (Eph. 5). After all, if you are like me, for the first time in a long while, you have time! Maybe you've been laid off from work. Almost certainly church services have been cancelled. School and universities are out of session. Stores are closed. Travel is restricted.

Life has suddenly become “inconvenient,” but that “inconvenience” is providing new opportunities—both digital and personal—to reach our world in ways previously impossible or unconsidered. If the coronavirus has granted you extra, unexpected time, make the most of it! This isn't a time for leisure, to catch up on your favorite Netflix series, conquer that video game, or indulge our minds with media while the days and weeks of “quarantine” slip away. Instead, God calls us to redeem (take full advantage of) the extra time He has given us to effect eternal change. Previously, you didn't have time to call that relative, drop a note, have the neighbors over for dinner, Skype your workmates, write a missionary, take a day to tackle some “fix-it” projects at church, etc. Now you can! All with the direct purpose of sharing the hope of Christ with a lost world. One day we will stand with Christ in a new heaven and new earth, where there will be no more sin, no more disease, no more death. Let's do all we can in these next few weeks of “downtime” to ensure that others around us will stand there with us!

**M.T.**

*BIEM thanks all of our friends who continue to give and to pray for this ministry despite challenging times. As our workers overseas emphasize, these aren't days in which to relax. Let's pray for a spiritual awakening and prepare our hearts to be part of it! ■*