



BAPTIST INTERNATIONAL *Challenger*

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Created Unto Good Works

BIEM missionary Vitaly Bilyak once commented that, in Ukraine, people are leery of churches. The media there have portrayed churches as places that lure people in to get something from them. But when a flood struck, God gave Vitaly and believers in Ternopil a chance to demonstrate just the opposite. Here is a report in his own (translated) words.

“Dear friends, these past several weeks have been special. This was a time when action was needed, not words. In this letter I want to share with you how we were able to use our assignment to perform good deeds. As the Apostle Paul said, ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’ Ephesians 2:10.

“Based on this text, it becomes clear that God occasionally allows times when people expect good from the church. Such a time came to western Ukraine.

“As you know, here the majority of people live humbly, even poorly. The Lord allowed that, after a dry springtime

we received rains. Someone added up and said that rain fell for forty days in a row. It wasn’t that the rain was nonstop. It simply rained each day. And there were heavy downpours. According to meteorologists, in four days we received the same amount of rain that we normally get in three months of summer. While all of this water was falling, flooding began.

Rivers overflowed their banks. Streams of mud from the mountains swept away everything in their path. In its wake, the water left behind destroyed bridges, damaged homes, flooded fields and ruined gardens. Sewage from septic tanks got into wells. Flooding left behind mountains of debris, smashed trees in gardens, and up to a half-meter layer of dirt and refuse.

“As these events began appearing in the news, we began to think that we should help. But what did we have? The first thing that came to mind was that we had about a ton of humanitarian aid. We’d been saving these items for poor people from the city, but it became clear that other people needed them more. We decided to start with what we had on hand. In addition,

we contacted our friends in other churches and requested aid from the BIEM mission. We thank the mission for the fast response we received.

“Our strategy was to provide assistance through believers who live in those villages. All of our trips made strong impressions. There were a lot of emotions, much pain, disappointment in the government, weary people, and tears. One person might attempt to joke. Another simply expressed gratitude for the aid. Yet others were panic-stricken and didn’t know how to go on. Many people were sick from drinking contaminated water.

“These trips were precious to us, because they reminded us that the church is the hope of the world. Our assignment is to remind people that there is a loving and caring Lord.

“To distribute the aid we had collected, we planned three trips to villages that were suffering from flooding. These were two trips to the village of Belye Oslavy in Ivano-Frankovskiy region and one trip to the villages of Revno and Streletskiy Kut in Chernovitskiy region.

continued on page 4



Men from the rehabilitation center loaded, assembled, and helped to distribute the aid parcels.



With bridges wiped out, delivering aid became a challenge.



Unexpected torrents of water destroyed or buried whatever lay in their path.

Reflecting God's Love

In 2020, the countries where BIEM missionaries serve went into various degrees of self-quarantine. People lost jobs. Public transport didn't run. Those without work or cars ran low on food. Doctors and nurses couldn't get to hospitals.

Seeing neighbors in distress, our missionaries rallied assistance. By caring and acting, they reflected God's love. Here are a few glimpses of love in action.

Nikolai Ryzhuk, Drogichin, Belarus

"While distributing groceries to needy ones, I was concerned for one family. About seven months ago, a woman and her four children began attending our church. We decided to take them groceries and get better acquainted. Her name is Lena. Her three older children attend school, but not the youngest. After her fourth child was born, her husband deserted her. He said, 'I can't feed you. Live however you want.' The government gave her a two-room apartment. What she owns is old



This newcomer to church never asked for help but was so touched to receive aid in Christ's name.

and worn out. I was surprised at how she lives without grumbling.

"I asked why she's missing teeth. She said her husband hit her, but she has no money for a dentist. Another amazing thing is that she doesn't ask our church for help. So, our unexpected action brought her special joy. Thank you for all your love and your prayers for us. May the Lord abundantly bless you, your families, and your country!"

Yura Levtseniuk, Lviv, Ukraine

Yura Levtseniuk volunteered to drive medical personnel to and from the hospital when buses stopped running. He says, "Thank you for the sincere prayers, our beloved friends. In our city, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was glorified through the ministry of 'Lviv's Angels.' A large number of medical personnel were



Yura Levtseniuk and other believers ("Lviv's Angels") provided vital transportation for medical workers. The mayor even sent him a thank-you letter!

evangelized. We distributed many gospels. Doctors received the Word of God like never before! This is a divinely appointed time, which we must use."

Vika Skripnik, Borschiv, Ukraine

"I thank our Savior, who gives us opportunities to serve Him, including

during quarantine. I've had chances to visit families, to talk with children and parents. People's hearts are more open now.

"Maria is a young mom who's raising two daughters alone. At one time, she'd attended summer camps. She even visited a Sunday service. Now she realizes she's made a lot of mistakes in life.



The Skripniks thank God for letting them deliver groceries and a hot plate to Maria. May God water the seeds of the Gospel sown in many hearts.

"I believe the day is coming when Maria will accept Christ. I thank the Lord that we can demonstrate Christ through actions. With God's help, we were able to buy this family a hotplate for heating food and to provide some groceries."

Vitaly Bilyak, Ternopil, Ukraine

"I telephoned the orphanage. I understood they wouldn't permit a group to come and visit the children, but could we do something to help them? I learned that they needed toilet paper, masks, and cleansers. My wife and I bought the necessary items. Also, we bought sweets,

continued on page 3



The Bilyaks' church had to stop their orphanage ministry due to the pandemic, but they still found a way to bless the kids in Christ's name!

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"Reaching the world for Christ since 1981"

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Glimpses from the Mission Fields

As we've stated more than once, evangelism and Bible distribution are at the heart of BIEM's activities. Here are a few peeks of these from our fields.



In the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine, over half of those in Extreme Youth Camp came as unbelievers. But through Bible reading, songs, testimonies, and other activities, a number of campers repented.



Our Nikolai Ryzhuk was one of the coordinators of a special camp in Belarus. This camp was specifically for kids who had been adopted!



In Lviv, Ukraine, Yura Levtseniuk recently baptized these four young men. May God use them to accomplish great things for Him!



The church in Chervona Sloboda, Ukraine, was thrilled to receive a gift of new puppets in our last container. With these, they can prepare new Gospel presentations for churches, camps, schools, and orphanages.



Sasha Petrenko nearly had to cancel children's camp due to the pandemic. But then the mayor gave the green light! These kids eagerly read their illustrated Scriptures.



The joy of salvation! In Central Russia, this camp pastor enjoyed the privilege of leading these young souls to Christ.

...Reflecting God *continued from page 2*

cookies, and fruit for the kids. Of course, we couldn't give a Bible lesson, but we got to chat and offer encouragement, give them sweets, and to leave items for disinfecting the kitchen, bedrooms, and bathrooms. For now, we're using funds leftover from the youth being quarantined."

Sofia Buyko, Bilogrodka, Ukraine

"I received the assignment of delivering a food parcel to a Christian widow. When she opened the door and saw a package of food, tears welled in her eyes. She said she

had asked God for help. Her supplies were meager. She hadn't been sure she would have anything to eat in a few days.

"When a deacon was delivering food parcels to needy unbelievers, he saw bewilderment in their eyes. For them, his arrival was like thunder from a sunny sky. They could barely believe strangers would bless them that way.

"For us, this way of expressing care opened hearts for the Gospel and created a chance to fulfill God's Word, which says that we should love, not in words only, but also in deeds." ■



In the village of Smolin, humanitarian aid from BIEM gave locals a reason to praise God.

...Good Works *continued from page 1*

“The things we gathered and purchased were:

- 2.2 tons of food (2.1 tons purchased, 100 kg collected)
- 354 packages of laundry detergent
- 170 one-liter bottles of dishwashing liquid
- 1 ton of humanitarian aid (clothing, shoes, sheets, towels)
- Over a ton of bottled water (each bottle was 1.5 gallons)

“The men from our ‘House of Salvation rehabilitation center’ rendered much assistance in this work, as also did the men of our church. They were movers. They assembled grocery packages, and they traveled along on the trips.

“During the first trip to the village of Belye Oslavy, when we took humanitarian aid, we drove our minibus from the rehabilitation center to the ford over the river since the bridges had been wiped out. Doing this ruined the clutch.

“During our second trip we visited a local pastor. In his village, everyone fondly called him ‘Uncle Vanya.’ They respect him and love him. His home was situated right in the middle of a torrent of water. We were there ten days after the water hit, but what we saw was very depressing and sad. When we arrived at his house in our two vehicles, we saw how an elderly woman, with no shoes,



Ten days after the flooding, villagers were still digging belongings from the mud.

Flooding ruined crops and contaminated water supplies.



was pushing a wheelbarrow full of mud out of the yard. This turned out to be his wife. He had recently suffered a stroke and wasn’t able to do heavy labor. Local brethren helped him a lot, but it was still very sad to see.

“They hadn’t even begun to pick vegetables from their garden. The water had knocked out of commission everything that was electrically powered or operated by gasoline engines. One wall of his barn had collapsed. The walls of his home were still damp. Even in the midst of all of this, his concern was for his neighbors. He feared that we might miss someone as we delivered packages of food and household cleansers.

“This trip was special because many people accepted a New Testament. We didn’t simply hand them out immediately to everyone; many people already own one. We asked each individual, ‘Do you have a Gospel or a New Testament?’ I didn’t count, but in the second trip alone, we distributed more than fifty New Testaments and about the same number of New Testaments with pictures for children.

“Literally yesterday we made our last trip. It turned out that heavy rain fell all

night before we arrived and all the day we were there. People were scared. All night long, lights were burning in the windows of houses. People didn’t undress. They had packed their papers and valuables. They even had suitcases packed and ready to leave.

“They were afraid that the river would once again overflow its banks but, thanks be to God, they didn’t need to flee. In the morning, when we knocked on doors to deliver aid, many were sleepy. They were frightened and discouraged. They shared with us their anger at politicians. Many had come and promised them aid and protection. They had made big promises on camera in front of powerful earth-moving equipment. But all the equipment followed the politicians when they departed, and people were left with their poverty and fear of new disasters. For them, our coming was a true illustration of the Gospel. We reminded people about God, who loves them more than anything, cares for them, and desires fellowship with them.

“Please pray that the Lord will continue to work in the people we helped.” ■



“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).