



## TERNOPIL, UKRAINE *3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2015 Report*

### July

Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters, coworkers with God in His great work of evangelism!

For us it's a blessing to recognize and pursue the common cause. From time to time there is a feeling that you are alone in this difficult ministry, but that is certainly not the case regarding the time spent on the project "Choose Life." Our brotherhood has a youth project, which aims to help small churches in holding summer camps for children and youth. We invited the project to come here, realizing that we need such assistance. In addition to evangelizing, the team has goals of getting acquainted with churches in need of ministers, spiritual growth of the team members. For us, in addition to help in evangelism was the purpose of getting acquainted, so that our youth would get to know people from other churches, to feel that we are many, that there are other churches who give their assistance to others and accordingly would teach us to give back.



Youth teams of 7-10 people go out to various towns and villages to help. These teams consist of youth from various churches. In our case, the team met right here in Ternopil, them with each other and them with us. In previous letters I wrote of how events this summer developed very precipitously. Because God gave us a building for the ministry, we decided to begin ministry right in that district where the church will be.

We had to organize everything quickly. As you will recall, we acquired the new building one day, and the very next day set out for our extreme summer camp. We came back from that camp, and then we had a little over a week to prepare the new location for a local day camp, to find a playground for day and evening use. Our new friends from the youth team helped in this very much. With great enthusiasm they launched into cleaning graffiti from the windows, washing floors, trimming the grass around the parking area. Around this time I met the principal of the school near us. Since we needed not a one-time permission to use their playground but a continuing relationship, I suggested to her that we help them with several things.

First, we cut the grass on their sports field. No one had mowed it since the beginning of summer and it was knee-high. Then we took over a bulldozer to do the preparation work for putting a racetrack around the field. This was not expensive for us, but she considered it a great help. Now we are almost friends. The sports field is open for us to use for any activity. I believe that if a need and desire arises, she will let us into the gymnasium. This also opens a possibility of helping needy families through the school.

The whole project consisted of 3 parts all week. Each morning began with a children's program – children's day camp. As



always, there was a lot of motion, noise, activity, gladness... On the first day we had 35 kids, but then we had more than 70 children. During the Bible story time, more than 20 kids prayed the prayer of repentance. Nearly every day about 10 parents would listen, and they heard how the children asked forgiveness from God.

After game time came lunch. Sisters from the church prepared meals for both teams. Then came a short rest, followed by the social project. During this time, our guys cut the grass at the school, cleared away trash from the park and from along the streets... It's important that every team member wore t-shirts with the name of the project on front, and on the back were the words of John 3:16. When our teams of 7-12 people went around wearing gloves and carrying trash bags and gathering trash, many people asked them, "What are you doing? Who is forcing you young people to do this?" "How much do they pay you for this?" And each question gave them a chance to say, "We are Christians and we are doing this because we love our city, and the people of our city and this region." They added, "Soon you will have a Christian family center in this area," and they invited the children to children's camp and teens to an evening youth program.

In the evening we set up a volleyball net in the park and began the youth program. Following a volleyball tournament came a time of fellowship and singing. This was a very populated area of the city at that hour. We had individual youth and groups of young people approaching us. A group of guys on bicycles spent several days with us. For the last day we planned a picnic. At these meetings the conversation was more personal than organized. This gave a chance to get acquainted, to exchange phone numbers to meet again at youth meetings.

We are thankful to the Lord that we have felt His great Church supporting small groups. Of course, this was a human resource, but there was also the financial component. We are grateful to everyone who supported the camp projects financially. Without your aid, there would not be all of the things described above. But special thanks go to our prayer partners. We can call people to repent, but we know for sure that the Lord summons people to Himself, not the preacher. Thank you to all of you.

In the midst of all this camp ministry, we understood that we could really use a dynamic youth leader, who would organize the youth for ministry to the Lord and evangelism. For a person who loves the Lord and youth, having solid Bible training, capable of organizing and of inspiring youth to ministry.

## August

Greetings, dear friends!



Whenever I want to share with you the blessings experienced in the ministry of Christ, I feel some trepidation. I fully understand that, without your help and support, our ministry would be much different, and with little effect. There is a certain fear of omitting something important; I very much want to convey how God is good, helping us along with you, so that you clearly understand our labor is not in vain before the Lord! Another side of this fear is to refer too much to ourselves, as if to say that we here in Ternopil are the classiest people. Therefore, for me such letters are a vaccination against pride. Such letters also provide yet another opportunity to say to myself: «With the Lord's blessing, and without a great team of workers from God, many of whom you don't even know, you, Vitaly, are nobody.»

We planned for our summer camp ministry to be very modern. The place and the dates were agreed on in advance along with those from whom we wanted to rent a location for the camp. Ever since last winter, the youth team has known its role and has prepared a program for it. This year we have chosen the program consonant with military actions in our country under the theme "whole armor of God." We prepared to hold an evangelistic program in which we desired to bring to the young people the news that there is ongoing a struggle

for people's souls, that there is a spiritual realm in which each person takes part, and each one is either a conqueror or the conquered. We wanted to tell the young people that Jesus had defeated the Devil through death and resurrection. We were all in good moods. We were all thinking about what we could do to make this camp memorable. The youth came up with good and interesting moments. All the leaders were to meet the children in clothing made from very coarse cloth, similar to that worn in the the time of Christ. For one of the very first days we planned an «unexpected sword fight between the Christian and evil.» We decided that as the evening service worked toward its conclusion that several leaders would prepare. In the grass near the place of worship at the right time they set fire to spilled gasoline to grab attention and to achieve the element of surprise. When the children came over to see what was happening, the battle would begin. First, "evil" would simply to strike the Christian, and then the Christian would receive weapons "from God" and conquer evil. The team emotions were off the scale! Everyone was in anticipation. As we did last year, we had approached the center for social services and suggested we accept some children from troubled homes. For a long time before this camp, all 60 openings were reserved, but people began to telephone and to come personally with a request that we accept their kids in our camp. Some people we put on a long waiting list in case some of those on the original list could not come.

But then something happened that raised the question of whether we would even be able to hold a camp at all and jeopardized all our plans. At a distance of 1.5 or 2 kilometers from the territory of the camp was located, a skirmish broke out between two armed groups. Simply put, this was gang violence, but because of the political overtones and in the context of military events in eastern Ukraine, all news TV channels covered the story. It was talked about on all of the country's talk shows. Most of the people, whose children were with us in the camp had never before heard about the village of Lavka, but now all over the news they were talking about it. Some politicians were predicting a developing military situation in western Ukraine, like in the east. And the situation became even more complicated by the fact that one of the armed groups hid out in the forest of the village where our camp was to be held. Along the road leading to that village the national guard had established four checkpoints. Columns of military hardware began to move about the region. Military helicopters flew overhead... In the news they talked about downed helicopters, about how these armed people took a 9-year-old boy captive... As it turned out in later news reports, this information about a shot-down helicopter and a captive boy turned out to be false, but panic had done its work. If the conflict in eastern Ukraine is 1000 kilometers away, this local problem was only 300 kilometers away... And camp was to start in less than 3 weeks.

Parents began to call me. But there was nothing we could tell them or promise them. We ourselves began to realize that God was doing something, but we could not see how this situation would turn out. The most extreme option was to simply cancel camp. We asked everyone to pray about this situation privately. We didn't announce anything over social media because we didn't want to start further panic. We considered changing the place of the camp. But that was not so simple. Some places didn't have the dates available, others cost too much. Indeed, the matter of changing locale did not settle much. If the situation did not settle down, then no one would let their kids go anywhere... One person even stated, «My children aren't going anywhere, not even if things calm down.» Particularly decisive was military families, whose parents were in the war. Our list began to change. People withdrew from going. We began to offer places to those whom we had turned down a month earlier. Some agreed; others said they would not let their kids go. Then we ran out of names on our long waiting list, and the list simply shrank from 60 to 50 remaining, then to 40... We began to panic. And to pray about the situation. However, the situation in that region began to quiet down. The military checkpoints were removed, the military vehicles departed the helicopters no longer flew overhead... Our list began to grow again, and climbed once more to 50.

Then we met with the parents of all the children. Never had our parent meetings been so sincere. We honestly said that we cannot promise that no armed conflict would happen again... But that we would promise that we would do everything that depended on us to protect their children and to care for their safety. We talked with them about the importance of prayer and asked them to pray for the camp and the children as well as they knew how. We spoke about how we gather children to teach them in camp and what we would teach. And nearly all the children went to camp. By the final count, the camp was full to 100%



Even more, this was the camp that filled up with children by our prayers. How they prayed! Every evening hear children's prayers. But the final prayer, when I gave a call to repent, was special. They began to pray all at the same time, and I had to establish an order. First I suggested that those who sat in the rear and wanted to pray go first. Then the middle section, then the front. In all, about 40 children prayed.

Praise the Lord for this camp. The Lord was especially kind to us. When we arrived, there had still been one block-post on the road, but 2 or 3 days later they removed it. Peace came to that area...

Thank you for your prayers and support of the camp ministry.

P.S. Here are photographs that people saw on the news. This intersection is 1.5 kilometers from the place where we held the camp.



## September

Greetings to you, dear co-workers of God!

It's a great joy being able to co-labor with you. I want to share with you some news about the Rehabilitation Center.

As you will recall, exactly one year ago we had a fire, and the house where the rehabilitants lived burned. There were huge concerns whether that ministry would survive. But the Lord was very good to us, and the ministry continues and develops in two directions; the spiritual ministry with addicted people, and the reconstruction ministry on the house.

You will recall that immediately after the fire we created a dormitory that is divided into four rooms, and temporarily the rehabilitants live there while we continue repair work on the main building. Outside, the house looks great right now, because we have done completely the facade and finished the drainage of the house, so the walls won't be damp. The ground floor of the house is already warm. The brothers from the church did entirely the heating, water supply and plumbing of the ground floor. We have started finishing work inside the house. The truth is, today I had to dismiss the contractors, who were doing the interior repair. Probably at some point we'll need to contract some new workers. We had complaints about the quality of the work.

As always, the rehabilitation center has filled up with new people before Christmas. Each one of them is like a history book—of poor and sad things. But each one has come for answers. One drug addict is missing a finger on his hand. He was married but loved narcotics. Once he was running from police and jumped over a fence and caught his wedding ring on the fence, which tore off the finger. This is symbolic, because when the finger ripped off, his family also fell apart. There came to us a tall, unhappy man with no family. Another man is an alcoholic father of six. All his life he worked on construction projects in other countries, and as a result also lost his family... And so on, you could write the story of each new man.

This past Sunday I became an unwilling witness to a conversation. An alcoholic man of about 60 was brought to our morning service from the neighboring town of Ivano-Frank. And in our church already was brother Yura, who came here from that same city about a year ago. But since Yura had no one in that city to go back to, he decided to stay in Ternopil. Now he is preparing to be baptized. God took care of the questions of where he will work and live. At the place where he works they allotted him a free room to stay in. Every Sunday he helps to set up the sound system before the service, and then he takes it down afterward. I walked over to meet the new rehabilitant who had been brought to us. I asked his name and how old he is, and that was enough for a first meeting. Just then Yura walked up and said, «Hello, Nikolai; do you remember me?» The other fellow looked frightened and said, «I don't exactly recall» and so Yura said, «You cut me in the front a couple years ago in Ivano-Frankovsk» (he had wounded him with a knife). Continuing, Yura said, «The Lord has changed my life. Jesus forgave me, and I forgive you!»

At such moments, you realize that we're not doing what we're doing in vain. It turns out this man spent more than 30 years of his life in prison. He has spent half his life in prisons... Yura, too, spent 22 years in prison for murder... Perhaps it was not for nothing that they crucified Jesus between the other two criminals.

Please pray for our ministry at the Rehabilitation Center. Pray for our ministers, leaders in this ministry. For the completion of the repairs and construction...

With sincere wishes for your good,  
Your brother and coworker,  
Vitaly Bilyak



**Celebrating Katya's birthday in October**