



## TERNOPIL, UKRAINE *2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2015 Report*

### **April**

I send my greetings to you, dear friends -- co-workers in the cause of spreading the Gospel! It is always a joy to share with you about how God blesses us in our common work for the Lord. Along with many praises, we have a number of needs in our ministry, which we ask you to pray about.

Last month God gave us a unique opportunity for spreading the Gospel. One girl moved from Ternopil to Kiev to live; she accepted Jesus while in Kiev and started to attend a church there. But, she also loves our church very much. They have an evangelistic group in her church, and so they came to Ternopil right before Christmas with a program for our children. When they came, they also brought a bunch of artworks for an exhibition that they set up in the lobby next to the auditorium that we rent for our church meetings. While the children were listening to the nativity story, their parents could spend time looking at the pictures that featured biblical events as their main theme. It was then that God gave me an idea to invite this exhibition to come again for a prolonged time to help us in evangelizing of our city.

Then, such possibility came up, and the evangelistic group from Kiev told me that they could do it in the second half of April. This exhibition opens great opportunities for evangelism. It includes photocopies of different paintings created by famous artists and shows the events of the Bible as their main theme. We notified the authorities of the city of our intentions and set the exhibition on one of the sidewalks downtown. It is a busy place with many people. Some pass quickly as they go about their affairs, others come downtown to spend their leisure time. Yet others are returning from their workplaces, and others who are hurrying to their meetings... The exhibition gave us an opportunity to tell people about Christ without us imposing ourselves on them. It was they who approached us, looked at the pictures and asked questions. There was one Christian brother who came with the exhibition to do the talking. After two or three days of being with him, the brothers and sisters from our church who heard him talking to people found it pretty easy to share about Christ using the exhibits. It seems to me that this method like no other fits our religious context. These pictures are not icons like those they have in the Orthodox church, and still, they contain something appealing to an Orthodox person. Of course, we were not able to please the most eager from the Orthodox followers. The truth is – we haven't tried to. They were unhappy because on our paintings Jesus and the saints had no haloes over their heads. Still, most of the people listened to us with much pleasure and took Christian magazines and booklets with the invitation to visit our church.

I can't say that there were many new people coming to our church all at once, but that it was a good time of sowing spiritual seeds. During our conversations with people on the streets we had to remind many that it is not the religion that saves. For example, the picture of "Christophany" shows a group of religious leaders who would not accept baptism from John the Baptist nor Christ as the Lamb of God. They are pictured as a separate group of discontented people. Every time we got to talk about that picture we would point out that in our days many people are still trying to get saved by the means of religion, but it could not save people then nor would it be of any use now. Only Christ can save, being the only Mediator between us and God! Whenever we happened to be at the picture of "Jesus in the House of Mary and Martha" we would ask people, "How often do you read your Bible?" Usually, people would say that they had no time. We would then tell them about the choice that Mary made - she chose to listen to Christ. This way, if a person happened to have enough of time, we could share a special message at every picture, a message that would be relevant to a contemporary listener.

During this exhibition-evangelism I started to feel a strong desire for us to have such exhibits in our church so we could organize such exhibitions, at least two times a month, in different parts of our city. But, this is just an idea, just a dream...

I want to ask you to pray about the people in our church who repented of their sins but are not ready to completely dedicate themselves to God. There are five of them among the young people that repented at different times. They more or less regularly attend the church but, for various reasons, are not getting baptized or committing themselves to serving Jesus. For most of them it is a matter of their parents forbidding them. Others are waiting for who knows what... Please, pray for God to give them the courage to do what is right and an understanding of the importance of making this step. Time to time I touch on the subject in my preaching. One of the young fellows told me one day, "Vitalik, do not pressure me about baptism..." He understands that this is something he should do next but keeps postponing it every time.

## May

Greetings to you, dear friends and coworkers of God. It's wonderful to co-labor with you in our mutual goal of sharing the Gospel!

The events in our church in recent times have been like a fresh deep flowing river. Much noise, movement, and great speed. It was vital to act quickly. This is real life!

In one of my previous letters I told about we had to move our church services to somewhere else. In that letter I wrote about how I would like our next move as a church to be to a location we could actually own, not rent. I wrote that, sent it off, prayed about it and then got carried along by the ministry. Then, sometime in April, I received a letter from brother Rick Barry in which he said that there is a man who was prepared to donate funds to help us acquire a building for the church. This was news to get me on my feet! Could this really be happening? Mentally we absorbed this but didn't fully believe it. As you know, in recent times the Lord has led our new little church through some trials. Before October of 2014 we had rented for three years a modest sized office space of 84 square meters, where we did everything: services, youth meetings, children's and teen clubs, day camps and evening camps, leaders' meetings, and rehearsals for musical groups. There we had our church office, warehouse of literature and sports equipment... But then the landlord raised the rent beyond our means. We moved on to other places to rent: for services we rented a room in the trade union building. And for other meetings we rented an office, plus a storage area in a garage was rented to keep our church equipment in. Other items were stored at the rehab center. But at the end of September we needed to change the places we rented, and at the rehab center we had a fire in the house where the rehabilitants lived. The fire took place at night, when seven men were sleeping there. Praise God, they were miraculously saved and no one was harmed. All autumn and winter we were busy with repairs to the center after the fire in order to keep the ministry for alcoholics and addicts going. Furthermore, there were constant problems in the place we were renting. In the room we rented for children's and teen meetings, the kids had rubbed, scraped their feet on the wall. We received a warning that if such a thing happened again we would be kicked out and looking for a new place. And at the other office we rented for evening groups, loud music from the bar downstairs bothered us.

And so, after all of these difficulties and trials God comforted us with a place of our own. God gave us a permanent place for the church. We looked at a lot of properties, met with sellers, spent time in prayer. We very much wanted this place to be blessed by God to serve for the development of the church.





We located such a place. This is part of a 5-story building. Part of the first floor and about the same size portion of the basement level. About 548 square meters. This is a former store and bar. It has 4 separate entrances. There are already installed modern gas heating, good doors and windows. This building is in a location where there are no other evangelical churches, about 10 or 15 minutes walk from the city center, and it has enough parking for automobiles.

In addition to that, the building is suitable for us because we want it to be near residential areas. We plan to name this site “New Life Christian Family Center.” Since we want the building used to the maximum, it would hinder it if we put

“church” on the sign. The populace there is basically Greek Catholic and Orthodox, and they would not allow their kids to come to a Baptist church. But a family centers sounds like another matter...

Now, parallel with a second camp that we are operating right on the heels of the previous one, we are considering all the various ways we can best use the new property. Of course, the first order of business is to prepare the main auditorium for worship services, and in the next 10 days we are ending our rental of the office space and moving all of our smaller meetings to the newly acquired building. There is room that we can use for meetings while simultaneously doing repairs and refitting. The next step will be preparation and decoration of classrooms in the basement for Sunday school; and on weekdays those rooms will be used for children’s clubs for kids from troubled homes (we can assist them with homework, provide a warm meal, and provide Christian nurturing). The largest basement area will be prepared as a warehouse area to receive humanitarian aid, and also a sports area for youth, since this will open a possibility to work with young people and their families.



Friends, we thank you for your prayers and support. Please pray for the Lord to give us wisdom in properly utilizing this building and for the means to refurbish and decorate it. Pray for the work of the church in this region that is new to us. Pray for residents of the city and especially for this area to see the light of the Gospel through the ministry of the church.

## June

Hello to you, dear friends!

Like always, summer is a time that is hot in all aspects. This summer has not been an exception. In general, people look forward to summer, but for us it is a nonstop time of working with the children and youth of our city, to tell them about Jesus through camp ministries.

At the end of winter we began to think and to plan the camp for youth. There were various ideas and programs we considered. We looked back on past camp experiences and tried to analyze the results. During this process we noticed that we had conducted “lazy” camps: resorts, warm showers, a meeting hall. We recalled things that had frustrated us and realized they were everyday things: a faucet for hot water had not worked, a door had been squeaky... As a result our youth group was filled with “children of civilization and comfort.” If it rained, they would not come to a youth meeting. Without certain conditions, they would not go to a conference... We realized that it was necessary to change the target audience.





We would like to see more active, dynamic people among our youth. So this year we decided to hold an extreme camp. We learned about them, considered possibilities, and decided to try it. Thus, as I write this letter after 4 camps this summer, I want to say that this camp achieved our expectations. Even though we worried about this camp more than the others, it went off very blessedly. We were concerned about the participants. We invited our friends, advertised it on social media sites. Among the youth in our camp ages ranged from 16-22. We had new people, and also those who had been with us for children's camp, but then had drifted away. There were new people whom we had met through the social services office in our city. The camp was held in the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine. In this place we lived in

tents on the bank of a turbulent mountain river. During camp we had two areas of residence. The organizer of this camp promised a nice field kitchen. Everything was cooked over a fire.

Each day we had an interesting extreme program. Especially extreme was white water rafting. From among our leaders we chose 4 people. They first passed the master class and became instructors for the others. Each river trip began with prayer and ended with prayer. This was a good testimony to everyone concerning God's protection. We rafted among rocks and through narrow channels, but everyone was safe. Besides rafting, we also had horseback riding and an 11-hour hike in the mountains.



The morning and evening fellowship constituted the core of the camp. Each morning before breakfast we held a praise time. We sang songs, read the Word of God and each morning we reflected on one or more of the Ten Commandments. The evening services were held in a very friendly and warm atmosphere. A bonfire. Hot Carpathian tea. A guitar. We played some games, laughed, sang more; then someone would share a testimony about how they came to the Lord. In camp we came to call this the "story of my life." Different evenings, different stories: one person would be from a religious family who grew disappointed with religion. Another story would be from a person who'd had a hard path through drugs and crime and prison... Another story would be an encouragement while another's was given as a caution... And each evening had its own special theme. We talked about the 3 basic questions of life: Who am I? Where am I from? Where am I going? Of course, the very best reply to all 3 is found in Jesus Christ. The culmination of these gatherings was the Sunday morning worship service on the bank of a noisy river. It was good that we had a microphone and amplifier powered by a battery. That allowed us to talk louder than the rushing river. On that morning we talked about the power of the Cross of Christ.

After this camp we gained new friends. Some of the youth began to attend our church worship services and other gatherings. They have helped out in the general cleanup work at the new church building. We asked two guys to help out in a children's camp, and today I can rejoice as I see how these two assist with the kids.

Friends, thank you for your support of the camp ministry. Pray please for these young people who have heard the Gospel message! May the Lord give them repentance. Pray too, that the Lord will send us a dynamic youth leader, a young man who loves youth but who also has the fear of God. Pray for the development of the youth ministry.

With warmest greetings to you, your brother,

Vitaly Bilyak