



## TERNOPIL, UKRAINE *1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2014 Report*

Dear brothers and sisters, coworkers for God!

Greetings to you from Ukraine. The last letter I wrote to you was from old Ukraine. Speaking so confidently about the “new Ukraine,” I feel some fear. This feeling is similar to how a child feels when his mother hands him some fragile thing and at the same time warns: “Be careful. Don't break it.” Similarly, God again gives us a chance to change things for the better, but this chance is still very fragile, or perhaps we have not yet learned how to make the best use of it.

What we have experienced and what we are experiencing is hard to describe in words. For me, it's hard enough trying to express it in Ukrainian; it is even harder with another language. Thoughts run ahead. I would like to share about the pain we went through with your support. We would like to share our joy and share words of gratitude.

As you already know, for the past few months we in Ukraine have experienced what we call “Revolution of dignity.” Of course, events are changing rapidly. I will not describe in detail the political background to all events. I think you can more or less imagine what the Ukrainian people rebelled against. As we can see, on Facebook the theme Ukraine is a widespread one for discussion among our friends, regardless of where they live. It seems no one will ever again confuse the Ukrainian flag with the Russian one... But I would like to share what we have experienced, as believers, as Christians who have experienced moments like these the first time. Most of those in our church are young people, young in faith and young in age.

It all started with political slogans. People wanted standards of living to change towards human rights, economic development. In other words, people leaned toward European values. When our government started to give up all this and move toward Russia, people started to protest. We felt that we, as the church, should refrain from participating in political activities, especially since we were not sure that rapprochement with European democracy would not bring us any new problems, such as the legalization of homosexuality and other “costs of democracy.” But then something happened that we could not ignore: our police brutally beat protesters, peaceful students, ordinary men and women. It shook society, and the church as well. Regardless of political orientation, many stood against police violence. And beginning on November 30, 2013, a long confrontation began in Ukraine. It lasted through the whole winter. It was cold, there was snow, rain came, and there were clear days, but there were always lots of people. There were clashes with the police, and there were periods of calm.

But what were we, the people who know God to do? Take part in the most active expression and throw Molotov cocktails at the police, or stay away? It was no longer a question of politics. It became a question of upholding the truth, of condemning evil and violence against people. Many were expecting answers from me personally. We gathered for prayer and decided that each of us must decide for himself

concerning his own degree of involvement in these events. However, what we as a church could offer as a really big and powerful contribution to this revolution was to pray. We all have devoted ourselves to prayer to strengthen the country, the government, and the people. We held prayer meetings specifically for the situation in the country, of course, and we were asked to pray for our friends. And today we are grateful to all of you who prayed with us. We agreed that as soon as two of us would meet in the city, at any gathering or chance meeting, we would take the opportunity to pray together. Many of you have prayed about the situation in Ukraine. What happened during these prayers – it was a miracle. We felt special unity of God's people. If the situation was worsened, we prayed all the more fervently, cried, opened our senses to God. All the while we had opportunity to watch live streaming of the hottest spots. I remember at some point commandos went on the offensive with the help of armor. They began to break through the barricades. When we found out about it, we began to pray, and this attack was repulsed.

We sensed blessings even through the weather. Usually in Ukraine we have strong cold, snowy winters, and meteorologists warned that this year's winter would be hard. And winter really was raging, but not us. If I remember correctly, at one point even Niagara Falls froze, but we had a more or less mild winter, and people were able to stay at the barricades at rallies.

And then there was pain. Very strong, afflicting pain. On February 20, the authorities began to shoot peaceful protesters using snipers. Today they say that it's possible it was a provocation and possibly an execution carried out some “third party” interested in destabilizing the situation. I do not know if we will ever know the truth. But it something terrible was happening before our eyes and that we could not stop it. We saw all of these broadcasts over the Internet, and our feeling was of helplessness and only prayed: “Lord, have mercy on these people and stop this horror.” Pools of blood, people dying right in the screen of your computer through which you yesterday watched some humorous video on youtube. Young boys age 19 years old, older men, one wearing a helmet for scooter, someone in a bicycle helmet, and someone just in a hat, some people held aluminum shields in clashes with Special Forces. And some hands held wooden shield made with their own hands, yelling for help, swearing... The ones shot in the head fell instantly. Those shot in the heart area fell more slowly. I'll never forget the guy lying wounded, his outstretched arm frozen... The shock and tears... Someone was crying, someone just sighed from feeling the pain.

I am 38 years old, and for 17 years I've lived with the Lord. But now I've become more aware of many things. An example comes from the words of Paul, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” Romans 8 : 26. Paul said, “groanings.” At that time, it was difficult to say a “correct” prayer. We did not fully understand what was happening. Who or what should be pray for? For God to stop the snipers, or for those who carried the wounded under fire, for those who gave the orders, or for the thousands of defenseless in the center of Kiev... Now I know that the Holy Spirit was praying for us all, and we were sighing.

When the situation cleared up, we realized that we already live in another country, in a country where the blood of innocent people was shed for freedom. And the thought struck me: I've already heard that somewhere! It's the price of freedom! When someone pays for the slave and lets him go free. Someone died in the war for the freedom of their country. These guys with sticks and wooden shields, who are called the “Heavenly Hundred” did not die in battle, but their blood has gained power. Someone wrote on the social networks : “When you give or take a bribe, feel the blood of the «Heavenly Hundred» on your hands.” People have realized that the price of freedom is high. But again a thought: What about the

innocent blood shed on the Cross of Calvary for mankind? The sinless God-man Jesus Christ did the shedding! So do you value that freedom? Do you not feel His blood on your hands when you sin?

Now for a lot of rethinking. I'm rethinking many things. Personal analysis and evaluation of the ministry, analyzing many things about the ministry. For example, many talk about the innocent victims, the "Heavenly Hundred." But at the last session, I talked about how, in 22 years of independence, millions of abortions were committed due to "no fault of the murdered." Ukraine officially does 250,000 abortions per year. Roughly, I'm talking about 20-30 million abortions since our independence... Why do you not hear calls to honor the slain in the public squares and streets? Perhaps it is the responsibility of the church to denounce society? There are other problems...

I think all the time. Now we are continuing to pray, because Ukraine has not had time to enjoy freedom from the "gangster government" as we're on the verge of war with Russia. The other day I remembered that if that if special wartime need arises, as soon as the first shots are fired, I can be recalled to active duty in the Army. I had not thought about it since 1995, when I came home from the Army. Each new morning, before I read the Bible and pray, I turn on the news and see how the night went in Crimea, whether there was any fighting. Then I turn off the news and thank God for another day, another night lived without war spent under the same roof with loved ones, for another meeting of the home group, for another service of the church for a Sunday worship service. We begin to realize the special words James wrote [in the Bible]: "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." James 4:15

Please pray with us and for us!

Vitaly Bilak, your brother and collaborator in the work of God

Vitaly requests prayer for 2 things:

1. In his church, he is evidently the only man who could be called back into active military duty. He does not know whether this will happen, but it's fully possible he could be called upon to leave the church and family and go back to army life.
2. Both construction and reconstruction have been done at the rehab center. The police somehow became aware of this and demanded to see the permits for this work. There are no permits; they just worked. Now the police are hinting about bribes they might be willing to accept. Vitaly will be engrossed in this situation for at least the upcoming days.