



TERNOPIL, UKRAINE

3rd Quarter 2013 Report

July

Greetings to you, dear friends, coworkers who serve our Lord! I am very glad to share with you some of the interesting and new experiences in ministry.

One day in July I got a call from brother Sergei Skrypnyk. He lives in the south of Ternopil region. We do not often meet with him because of the distance. He is doing ministry in the small villages of the region. On that day, he told sad news: his grandmother had died. But the situation was not easy – this would be the first funeral for the village in a Baptist church. This church is small and has never seen a funeral conducted by Baptists. No one knew what would happen. Would people come or not? How would they react? What will be the reaction of the local priest? In such situations, a lot depends on the position the priest takes. Some relatives insisted that the funeral should be held according to Orthodox tradition. But Sergei held firm, and it was decided that the funeral would be held by the church where his grandparents attended. Moreover it was in their house of worship that it was performed.

We have a tradition: usually a funeral service is held 2 or three days after the death. In the villages there are no funeral homes, so the body of the dead man stays in the house where he lived or a close relative's home. In the cities too, not all use the services of a funeral home. Both the Orthodox and Baptists, on the eve before the funeral, conduct funeral services. The Orthodox call it a funeral service, but we just say "funeral liturgy." At such worship services there are usually present neighbors, friends and relatives of the deceased person. Usually this is a good opportunity for evangelism. Typically, there are many non-Christians, which gives the opportunity to share the Gospel.

Sergei requested our help. But we had a problem -- the day of the funeral was Monday, the same day we had to start youth camp, and everyone who might have assisted with the funeral, including myself, was involved in the camp. That is why we offered to assist in the funeral evening service if it were held on Sunday. In the morning we were at our church, and then we and a small group went to the service. On our side, we wanted to support the sadness of the family and relatives of Sergei and minister in evangelism. Sergei was hoping people would come from the village.

On the way, we were worried as we rehearsed slow, mournful songs. We have lived in Ternopil almost 8 years, but we still have not held a funeral in our church because of the fact that most of the people in the church are youth or middle-aged people. Therefore, for some of us it was a new experience.

So, there we were, in the house of mourning. People dressed in black clothing. Usually at funerals we do not wear bright clothes. Women cry, the men are silent or quietly crying. On such a day we even greet one another in different way. Instead of "Good afternoon," they quietly say, "Praise God," or simply nod their heads and say nothing. After some words of sympathy to relatives, we went into a small room where in the middle lay the deceased dead man. Most people stood, and the eldest and the sick were sitting. Contrary to expectations and our fears, a lot of people came. The room was crowded. More people were standing in the hallway and even outside. Everyone listened to what we talked and sang about. There were testimonies, songs about our heavenly home and hope of life with the Lord. I preached a sermon. It was amazing. It's been a long while since people listened to me with such rapt attention. The Lord Himself led me and gave the right words. Then I talked about the centurion Cornelius, who was in need of Jesus. He was a good man, but not saved. It was a challenge to the religious people of the village. Most Orthodox people believe that if they are good, God will save them. They believe that if their good deeds outweigh the bad, they are saved. I talked about my deceased grandmother, who

had the courage to believe in the old age. She did not worry about what the neighbors would say; she accepted Jesus, and is with the Lord. But it is this matter of accepting Jesus that decides whether each person goes to be with God, not whether the person has joined a church, or attends the church where his parents went.

As I said, it was a very valuable experience for friends from our church, as well as a unique opportunity to share the Gospel with the people of the village.

Please pray about the religious people of our region, that the Lord would open their eyes and heart to take the gospel.

August/September

Youth camps

Greetings to you, dear brothers and sisters of the mission BIEM. I am pleased to share with you some good news about the youth camp at our church.

Every year, we saw that this is a very good method of evangelism. This year, with your active support, the Lord opened the opportunity to hold two children's camps, two youth camps. The first youth camp was held in Ternopil, not far from the site that we rent for church. As with the day camp for children, we decided to host the youth camp at the stadium of one of the schools. However, if that location made it easier for the children's camp -- kids saw something happening, games, and came themselves -- for the youth it was much more difficult. They had to get used to relations. Some came one day and never came back. Overall, about 40 people attended this camp. Not everyone came everyday, there were about 30 people who came each day.

The purpose of this first camp was to build relationships with young people in Ternopil and to gain the opportunity to share the gospel.



Our young people were very responsible in preparing for this camp. In addition to games, contests, and quests, every day there was a dialogue circle, where they sang songs and listened to a testimony. Originally, the idea was to invite people to witness a shining testimony (of former drug addicts, alcoholics, criminals, etc.), but then our people remembered that when they had heard such stark testimonies, they had thought, "It's fun to listen to, but I'm not as sinful as this man. I'm not a drug addict, not a prostitute..." So they decided to share their own testimonies. Why would 16-17 year-olds go to church? Why don't they go along with the majority? Why do they swim against the tide? These are the questions they had to address as they shared from their own lives. Moreover, the theme of the

camps was "GPS - do not get lost on the way." I watched it work. Young people listened to their peers, their stories and their arguments. Only one guy did not want to hear, but that was his problem. He had a very hard heart.

In the final days we went to the caves in the south region. By the photos, you can see that it was not a forgettable day. So many emotions. The team became good friends with the new people.

For this camp, we invited young people to go into a stationary camp in Transcarpathia. It is on this camp that we pinned high hopes. In this camp we wanted more of a call to repentance. Of course, we also gave a call to repent in the first camp, but the emphasis was on the second camp. Day after day, we created a list of people willing to go with us to a youth camp. A week before the camp, we had a lot of empty spots. We prayed that every person would be sent to us "from God." And God sent us such people.



The second camp was held in August. It was a stationary camp, which, together with the leaders, consisted of about 50 people. From the first day of the camp, we felt a certain spiritual struggle. This was

especially felt in the team leaders. There were tensions among the leaders; and there were troubled boys among vacationers. Our leaders are not professionals. Most of them were serving as leaders at a youth camp for the first time. In addition, they had to handle an age group that was only a couple of years younger than them. One thing saved us--prayer. We met in the mornings to lift young people up in prayer. We met for prayer after everyone went to bed. We felt that you and many other people were praying for us. We also had another special prayer. Sergei, the head of the program and the leader of the youth in our church, took an ordinary small smooth stone, and with a permanent marker wrote on it the name of the camp: «GPS» The stone became a "mobile prayer stone." Anyone who had the stone had to pray more about the camp and the leaders.



Usually, we held onto this stone for an hour or two, and then passed it along to one of the other leaders. So we had a prayer chain prayer.

The whole camp was in a very good dynamics and a good mood, but the special time was Saturday afternoon. It was the second-to-last day. On the last day, Sunday, we spent the morning and evening in worship. In addition, there was a farewell bonfire, and also a tour of the beautiful city of Mukachevo, which was near our camp. Saturday was to be the culmination of the day. In the evening, our evening service was much smaller.



After the service, everyone had to go through a special route, "the Maze of Life." It was not a game. It was something special. We the leaders organized five special stops. In this way everyone went one by one. It was impossible to talk, only to perform certain tasks. The first stop was "The Tree." Everyone had to draw a tree. The roots are the people who influence us, and the branches - these are people that are affected by us. The second stop was the "Letter." Everyone had to write a letter to himself. These letters were taken away, and we will deliver them in half a year, as promised. Then there was the stop of the "stone of forgiveness." On a large stone each one had to write the names of people who had offended them. Then he had to be in prayer to forgive them and to throw away the stone, as far as possible. Fourth Station - "washing of hands." At this station we were once again reminded of the essence of the Gospel of youth. You had to wash your hands - it symbolized that God created us to be clean and without sin. Then these clean-but-wet-hands were put into a bowl of dust, which was a symbol of sin. Each person did it to himself. But then there was something else. One of the senior leaders, in this case, my brother Andrew, washed his hands of this dirt, dried them, and applied an aromatic hand lotion. All this reminded everyone that for us personally the Lord forgave on the cross. In this case, the children were asked to read texts from the Bible to explain the gospel. Already at this station a lot of youth were crying. The last station was "The Cross." All that I have described up to this point I did not see personally, but was told about it. However, I was near the cross. Using many white sheets of paper, on the floor we made a cross, and on that cross put biblical texts about the death of Christ. About forgiveness, repentance. The youth came, one at a time, and read the texts of the Bible. I invited them to pray, if they decided to change their lives and continue it with God. Many bowed their knees and wept at the cross for their sins. Then the ones who made the decision to follow God lit a small candle, and stood these candles along the outline of the cross. It was all very touching. Almost all the campers prayed a prayer of repentance. Afterward many leaders came to renew their decisions to live with God. Some came to me and we talked a little bit about what kept them from making this decision together and about how to solve their problems. Unfortunately, we do not have any photos of this special time. We had decided that nothing should distract. This had to be very personal. Only man and God. Only after everything was concluded did I photograph everyone with the burning candles.

The camp was not the end of the youth ministry. It was only a particular stage. Immediately after the camp, we continued working with young people. Barely a few days later, we met again. We gave a photo CD to everyone who was in the camp. All this was only a pretext so we would have to meet on our territory (the church). We prayed a lot and dreamed that our young people will multiply through these youth camps. Through

September the ones who were in the camps gathered with us each Friday. They like to visit our youth gatherings. So far, everything looks pretty optimistic.

What I do know – the Devil does not like it when young people come to church. So we need your prayers.

Friends, I beg you, pray, please, for our young people. Especially for those young people who have attended the church before, in these past years. On them depends very much whether the newcomer youth will remain in the church or not. Many of them are still spiritually weak at a stage when we hoped they would be spiritually mature. They can be arrogant, easily offended so easily seduced by something. Now we all have the feeling that God has entrusted to us the little children who are in need of special care. But not everyone on the team can get over their pride. That scares me. Please pray for us.

Your humble coworker for the Lord,
Vitaly Bilyak