

# In difficult times, people began to turn to God

Igor Bandura, Vice President of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists, reports on an increase in baptisms following the Russian invasion of 2022



**T**he war in Ukraine has brought unspeakable suffering yet, at the same time, it has been a turning point for many seeking hope and answers to the hardest questions. In difficult times people began to turn to God. An open heart to spirituality became one of the consequences of the war and churches quickly responded to this need.

Local churches actively opened their doors to refugees and those affected by the military actions, and were transformed into centres of aid and support. Through humanitarian assistance, organising events for the population, and simple human care, churches have become important centres of not only spiritual but also social influence. The authority of the Church has noticeably increased as it became a place where people find not only physical but also emotional support.

The results of this work are evident: during the war, the number of baptisms increased from 2,600-2,700 to 3,000-4,000 annually. Despite the mass emigration of Ukrainians, new communities are being formed at a noticeable pace—50 new churches appeared in the first two years of the war, while another 25 are in the process of formation. At a time when human strength is depleted, evangelism through churches

bears abundant fruits, reminding people of the source of true hope—the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Baptism in a frontline city on the eve of occupation

Baptisms to the sound of explosions in Selydove, Donetsk region, took place in the summer of 2024. Before the frontline city was captured and destroyed in October, the church conducted water baptisms there in July.

On 6 July 2024, five people testified about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptised. Until the end, the church gathered non-churched people around the Word in the city. Looking at these photographs, it is hard to believe in such a reality.

Vladimir Semenov, the pastor of the local church, gently calls the baptised 'children of war.' All of

them began visiting the church after the full-scale invasion.

"There hasn't been such a desire for God and the church in 25 years of missionary work as there has in this war.

"The war has pressed people against the wall: they have felt alone, in constant anxiety. There has been no need for us to advertise or invite new people to come to services. We sow, and God does his work."

## A couple with alcohol dependency

On 20 August 2024, the First Belgorod-Dniester Baptist Church held a baptism. The church family grew by 32 people! Most of those baptised came to the Lord during the full-scale war.

Mykola and Violetta are a young couple. Their lives were far



from piety: both had alcohol dependencies, bad relationships with each other and with neighbours, and lost parental rights. They came to the church to receive humanitarian aid. And they stayed.

Over time, both Mykola and Violetta repented of their sins, overcame their dependencies, and allowed God to change their lives. The first thing they did after repenting was to officially register their marriage. Violetta restored her parental rights and brought her child home.

Mykola also transformed before everyone's eyes. He no longer used foul language and did not bother people around him. On the contrary, he began helping a nearby neighbour. This neighbour, Tatyana, learned that these changes happened under the influence of the evangelical community. She became interested: what kind of church is it where people change so much? Tatyana came to see, started attending a home group, and also repented of her sins.

All three made a covenant with God and became members of the local church.

### Baptism through evangelism of a football club

For about 20 years, a Christian football club 'Penue' has been operating in Kryvyi Rih. A group of Christians consistently works with 300 children and young people. Consisting of 18 teams of all age groups, the club's participants play at city, regional, and national championship levels. Importantly, they are brought up on Christian principles and values.

Last year, regular services began on the stadium grounds, which serve as the club's base, alongside football activities. They are primarily focused on the club's pupils and their families. This year, the first baptism took place here.

Mostly, these are young guys and girls who came to God through the club's work. Besides the football players and coaches, a couple of displaced persons from Kherson region, whom God led to the community, were baptised.

Moreover, a military man who came from the frontline literally for a few days joined the eleven people preparing for baptism at the last moment. Considering the good testimony of pastors

from another church, he was also included among those baptised. This was a reminder of the story of the Ethiopian eunuch baptised by Philip.

Overall, it resulted in a very symbolic number - 12 new people who are now in covenant with God!

### Mykolayiv

On 7 December, six people received baptism at the Church of God's Grace in Mykolayiv.

Among them was a young guy, Danylo, who was raised in an orphanage. A family of evangelical Christians took him under their care. When they took him, the couple was warned that he was Orthodox and should not be taken to gatherings of other churches. Danylo said this about himself.

On the Saturday before Sunday, his foster mother, Maria, offered him to go with them to the Baptist church in the morning and to the Orthodox one in the afternoon. He agreed. After his first visit to the church, Danylo decided to stay. Soon Danylo entrusted himself to the Lord Christ, and he is now a member of his church.







### The testimony of a displaced person from Donetsk in Poltava

"I am Bubnova Kateryna Oleksandrivna, 40 years old.

"We are an ordinary displaced family from Donetsk. We have two children: a 5-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son. Our story is one of faith, trials, and God's support.

"In 2014, to save our children from shelling, we left our native Donetsk and moved to Kharkiv. However, the war again forced us to leave our home. Leaving Kharkiv under shelling was difficult, but the Lord protected us every step of the way.

"We are now living in Poltava. It is a bit calmer here, but daily air raids remind us that peace has not yet come.

"One day I learned about a meeting programme for internally displaced persons at the 'Salvation' church. It was Divine providence—I registered and gladly joined the meetings. At that time, we temporarily lived in Poltava region, and the road to the church took 2.5-3 hours. But even that did not stop me, as

the desire to be at every meeting was incredibly strong.

"Six months after moving to Poltava, I reached out to the moderator who invited us to a home group. This decision changed our lives.

"A year after we began attending the home group, my husband and I repented and were baptised. It was a moment when we realised complete trust in God and gave our hearts to him.

"Today I am involved in church housekeeping ministry, and my husband independently leads a home group. We see how God uses us in his service.

"We are sincerely grateful to the 'Salvation' church for support during the hardest moments of our lives. You helped us discover God, know his love, and find peace in our hearts even in times of war.

"Glory to the Lord for everything! His mercy and care are always near."

**Igor Bandura is the Vice President of the All-Ukrainian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists**

