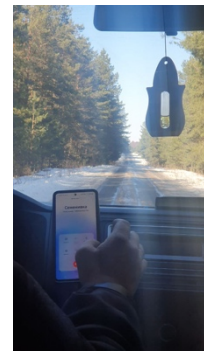


Dear friends,

Today is one year since Russia started a full-scale war in Ukraine. I want to tell you that my wife and I and the Realis team are so grateful for your amazing support, which has helped us not only to survive but to continue to expand the work of Realis. And I would also like to tell you an amazing story that makes me feel special excitement today, even in the midst of the tragic events that happen now in Ukraine every day.

My heart breaks after every trip to one of Realis's "hubs" where our teams bring food and things for survival. Last night our team of six returned from Semenovka, which is only 7 km from the border with Russia. We visited and talked to many people, including very poor families with young children, the local administration, the senior officer of the local border service, and, of course, our partners - local church activists. By the end of our visit, the place had come under heavy fire, although all the shells seem were falling outside the town where we were staying (thank you for the prayer protection, friends!) The local administrator told us we had to stay inside, so we weren't able to visit as many people as we had planned and came home well after curfew. Thanks again for your prayers, we were allowed to drive home even without special permission needed for driving during the curfew.



We learned that two weeks ago the Russian rockets had completely destroyed the local factory, and 50 families working there were left without means of livelihood. The head of the local social service gave us a document with an official stamp asking us to help 86 families with almost zero income. They have 68 children (including 32 orphans who live in foster homes) who go to bed hungry every day.

I was told that Realis is the only organization that has been delivering humanitarian aid to Semenovka since last summer. Many national and international organizations focus on helping internally displaced Ukrainians who live in large cities or in western Ukraine. Other organizations help those who live near areas of active fighting in eastern or southern Ukraine. However, many towns and villages in the north suffer from almost daily shelling from Russian territory. These places were under Russian occupation in February-March 2022. Many bridges have been destroyed. Most roads there are in very poor condition after being driven over so often by tanks and military vehicles. The ground near the road in many cases still contains many mines. It took us about seven hours to cover 180 miles to Semenovka in two heavily loaded vans with trailers.



But it's well worth the effort to get there! My special friends are Mikhail Perovich and Katerina Vasilyevna. They are waiting for us as their own children, (even though they have four children of their own who are over 50). When he was younger, Mikhail was

the pastor of the local church. Under the USSR it was unregistered and therefore especially persecuted. Unregistered in the 1960s and 70s were those churches that resisted the state order to keep children out of worship and Bible study.

Michael and Katherina told me stories over and over again from their lives when there was severe persecution of believers. I remembered hearing one of those stories when I was a teenager. The story was so amazing that it reached then our church near Kyiv. It was about the director (principal) of the local public school, who kept promising that if the pastor and his wife didn't stop teaching the children the Bible, he would get a state document to take away their parental rights. So one day he called all the teachers and students into the great hall and began announcing that the decision had been made and the papers were about to be ready. At that moment he suddenly fell to the floor and was found dead a few minutes later. His two sons, elementary school students, remained with their parents and continued to attend "illegal" worship services.



And now, almost 50 years later, I have found the end of that story. By the time Ukraine became independent, the Semenovka Baptist Church was registered and was able to buy a house to worship God. It turned out to be the house where the atheist school principal had lived 20 years earlier!

And now, keeping this story in mind, please think about what God continues to do:

- the Realis church regularly brings humanitarian aid to the ancillary facility of this church;
- the worship hall is filled with new believers;
- the current public school director is also the director of the church's Sunday school;
- the six other teachers at the public school are Christians;
- many local unbelievers bring their children to the church Sunday school;
- Mikhail and Katerina's oldest son is head of the regional council of Baptist churches in the Chernihiv region;
- the director of the Realis center in Semenovka is Andrey, whose daughter Natasha is the youngest child of a blessed older couple who treats me now like their son.

The Semenovka story is still developing. Every time I come there I meet new people and I learn new parts of God's story that He writes. It is an amazing feeling to be a part of this beautiful story. And let me tell you, that you are also a part of it! I know that we are together in it because we couldn't do what we do without your prayers and support.



Thank you!!!
Sergiy (and Irina too)

Kyiv, 02.24.2023