



## Ministry stories 2019

### Volodymyr Omelchuk and his family, Grace Church, Kyiv, Ukraine (74)

#### Greetings!

We are grateful for your support and prayer! Thanks to your help and contribution, we have been able to do a great work for God's glory. Today we want to share with you a testimony of our dear friend Vasil Feir.



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"My name is Vasil. I was born in a Christian family. Up to the age of 16, I was quite obedient to my parents, always attended church services and went to Sunday school. I lived up to all Christian values that were deeply rooted in my family. In 1992, upon my graduation from school, I decided to enroll to a driving school in the neighboring district. So, along with a couple of friends, I moved to a big city called Ushgorod.



There were about twenty of us at the driving school who didn't plan to go back home after completion of the course. Some of the boys rented apartments, some lived in dormitories, and I, along with three of my friends, rented a house. That house later became a storage facility for different goods. Back at the time, the border check points were opened all over Ukraine, particularly in Zakarpattia Region. People began to move huge amounts of various goods in and out of the country across the border. These goods were subjected to custom laws but, as always, there were certain people who found a way to omit them. We managed to find our place in the business as well. And that's how we started to make some money for ourselves. After two years in the business, the amount of people involved raised up to 50. After another two years, that number became twice as big. During that time, I had been charged with smuggling multiple times. But every time I was able to bail my way out. Most of my friends and associates knew I had come from a devout Christian family. As a matter of fact, I never pretended I hadn't. When I got into prison several times, I often met people there who eagerly discussed religious topics. Sometimes, I even sang Christian songs that I remembered my parents sing when I had been growing up. I can vividly

remember one man from Belarus, who always asked me to sing "Hands of Christ, hands of love", which he seemed to like a lot. Actually, I loved it too. And yet I realized that my life wasn't fully in the hands of Jesus. I repeated to myself many times that after a little while, I will repent, I will give my life to Him and there will be no excuses not to. But it felt like I wasn't ready just yet.

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In 1997 we moved to Check Republic and continued to do our smuggling business from up there. In October that year, I was taken into custody, but released after a couple of months under trial. The court didn't find me guilty. But in the Fall of 99', I was arrested and subsequently deported to Ukraine for 10 years. Once on the Ukrainian soil, I met up with some of my former associates. Shortly thereafter, the

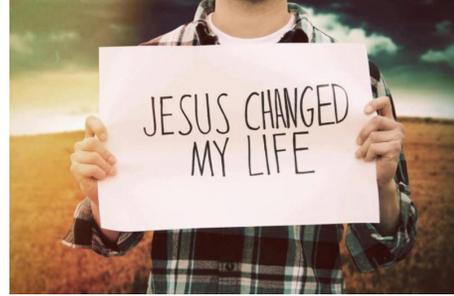


Ukrainian law enforcement put me on a watch list. So we decided our best way out was to flee to Moscow. We were able to go there without considerable complications in the process. I lived in Moscow for two years, but at some point made a decision to return to Ukraine. I came back in 2001. Right before Easter, I was arrested and taken into custody. About 2,5 months later, three years of conditional sentence was imposed on me by Court. Since that time, I decided to be more cautious. Actually, in that period there were many times when I faced grave difficulties in my life. Many times I got down on my knees to ask God for help. I knew my parents were praying for me every single day, and the very knowledge of it gave me the courage to turn to God as well. And I knew He heard me, because whenever I asked, He would always help me. But unfortunately, I didn't appreciate it as much as I should have. There was one time when I got drunk really badly. It was a day before the New year night. I came home in the morning, my mother crying. She begged me to go to church in the evening, but when my friends came to congratulate me on the upcoming New year eve, I decided I better stayed to celebrate. For the following six days, I was drinking hard. I can remember how I was taken to my home, half-dead, and when I woke up, everyone was already celebrating Christmas (In Ukraine, New Year in on January 1st and Christmas is a week later - January 7th). I felt really bad. I felt miserable. And on that Christmas, something in my mind began to change. I was burdened by guilt. I looked in the mirror and didn't see a man I longed to be and had to be. Instead I saw a thin man with black circles around his red foggy eyes. And that man was broken, afraid and alone. I decided it had to stop. It couldn't last any longer. So I locked up in my room, broke down to my knees and told God that I didn't want to be that person anymore. Even though it wasn't the first time I expressed my desire to change, this one was somehow different. It was out of grave desperation, out of the feeling of being entrapped in something I could never find the way out of, if it wasn't for loving and merciful God. So I decided I had had enough. I asked God to forgive me and said that I wanted to start a new life.

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On that Christmas I didn't go to church, since I looked terrible. But it didn't change a fact that I felt God's touch. It wasn't easy for me to let go of the things that I had used to find comfort in. I found myself something to do at home. I tried to read and pray a lot. And it woke up a feeling of

genuine joy I had had very long ago. A couple of days later, I was invited by my friends for a party. But I said I wouldn't go because I had some personal business to take care of. It was enormously hard for me not to return to my bad old habits. I said to myself that I wouldn't leave home until Spring so that not to be tempted by anything that I previously used to be attached to.



I didn't want to go back to those dark places in my life. If I wasn't concerned about any of that before, now I feared that I could break my promise to God, and under no circumstances could I allow that to happen. So I would read the Bible for hours, praying to God that he showed me a right direction in my life. I knew He was changing me, and I started to feel like a man I had been never before. I wanted to repent publically in the church. And after a little while it happened. My parents noticed that I was different and they knew it was God's answer to their prayers. Soon I found a job: unloading the trucks with cargo. It wasn't a lucrative job, of course, but it was a good new start. Some of my old friends thought that I had really hard times, that maybe I got ill or something. But the interesting thing was that, in spite of how it looked like to them, for the first time in my life I felt free. I started to look for a new job. But nobody would hire me. Everyone referred to me as to a walking problem. But then my uncle said that he was going out of town to do some construction work. I insisted that I was going with him to help. It was a chance for me to start something new, to change the place where I lived and move on. Since I didn't have any degree, the construction work was something I could settle for. Besides, I liked it and I wanted to learn more and more to do a better job. I realized most of the people of my age already achieved something in their lives, already became someone important. I, on the other hand, wasted all of my young years and became no one to respect. But I got what I deserved. I knew God was teaching me humility, and I kept asking Him to raise me up from my ruins. And He did. About half a year later, I got promoted. I learned to make right decisions and I knew it was coming from God.

The last 15 years of my life weren't easy as well. I often faced financial difficulties. But, thanks to God, now I have a loving wife and two wonderful sons, for which I am profoundly grateful to Him. God shows His mercy through the love of my family and by giving me an opportunity to have a good job. Not only do I try to tell people about how merciful God is, about how He redeemed me from a very dark pit, but also show it in my actions. God changed my life forever and I will do whatever it takes to let Him actively participate in my life and fulfill His holy will through me."

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### PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Please, pray for Vasyl and his family to have faith in following Christ;
- Ask God to bless our church and the ministries we carry out;
- We pray for your health and well-being! May God bless you richly.



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