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A table of contents for *Reformation & Revival* can be found here:

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## *An Introduction To An Urgent Appeal: “Let The Conversation Begin”*



*David Bryant*

The document you're about to read made its official public, bi-lingual debut on May 2, 2002, before the entire Western Hemisphere!

From Constitution Hall in Washington D.C., as a part of the nationally broadcast Concert of Prayer (climaxing America's National Day of Prayer), over a thousand radio stations and nearly that many television outlets broadcast a three-hour live prayer meeting using *An Urgent Appeal* as its primary agenda. Simulcast in Spanish (by radio and TV) throughout all of Latin America, the event reached into millions of homes from Alaska to Peru, as well as thousands of churches via satellite hook ups. At the same time, the entire document was made available (and still is) in e-book form to be downloaded free of charge at [www.urgentappeal.net](http://www.urgentappeal.net).

Titled *An Urgent Appeal to Christian Leaders in America for Consensus and Collaboration on The Biblical Nature and Hope of Corporate Revival*—no treatise on revival has ever had such an auspicious beginning. It was instantly introduced to a huge swath of Christ's Body, and then prayed over simultaneously on the very same night by a multitude of intercessors from a score of nations.

### WHO'S BEHIND IT?

But the faces behind *An Urgent Appeal* are just as riveting. It was developed through six major drafts, with input from over one hundred national Christian leaders (diverse in denomination and ethnicity), and initially proposed to 4,000 pastors at a national conference in January 2002. The document is officially co-sponsored by *Mission America* (representing 80 denominations, 300 parachurch ministries, 70 ministry networks and nearly 100 city-wide movements), *America's National Prayer Committee* (representing over 100 national prayer ministries and another 100 seasoned Christian leaders committed to a national spiritual awakening to Christ), and the *National Revival Network* (leaders with revival-related ministries who served as the "drafting committee" for *An Urgent Appeal*). Furthermore, it received numerous scholarly fine-tunings, with one Ph.D. church historian pronouncing it among the most significant publications on revival he had ever read.

### WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

So how did the drafting committee (National Revival Network) land on a 21-word title (which sounds a little like a Jonathan Edwards book title!)?

Let me take you back three years to one of the first meetings of the National Revival Network (NRN) at O'Hare Airport in Chicago. At the time there was no document, let alone a vision for a campaign. What we *did* have, however, was another shorter broadside on revival, issued a year earlier by *Mission America* and *America's National Prayer Committee*, titled: *A Nationwide Call to Prayer to The Church in America*. Signed by over 100 denominational and ministry executives, it was published in a full-page spread in *USA Today*. A number of NRNers had worked on it. As we prayed together that afternoon twelve months later, we concurred it was time to make the next move beyond *The Call*. Clearly, we concluded, God had raised up a prayer movement in our nation unprecedented in the history of American Christianity. But now, we agreed, it was time to help all the pray-ers get much clearer on

the hope we are praying toward.

As we continued to deliberate, the word that kept coming up in our discussions and prayers that day, was “*urgent*.” Finally, we concluded the Spirit wanted us to foster a call, not just for prayer but for corporate revival, and do so with much greater *urgency* than expressed in any previous appeals.

A few months later, when the document reached its first drafting, it was clear to all of us that we must convey the serious timeliness of our topic in the very title itself. Thus, the opening words included “*Urgent*” so it could not be missed. Incidentally, all of this happened a year before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. It is no coincidence that the historical compulsives of the Age of Terror in which we find ourselves require a spirit of urgency within the church like we may have never experienced in our lifetime.

From the outset, the word “*Appeal*” was easy to come by. After all, the Scripture is full of appeals. Calls for action rise with pathos from most of the prophets (consider Haggai to the remnant or Habakkuk’s commission of heralds to run with his vision). Appeals are woven throughout many of the Psalms (review Psalm 2 for starters!), as well as in the writings of Moses (much of Deuteronomy is a written appeal for the wholehearted pursuit of God). During some of the great revivals in 2 Chronicles, public declarations were made. The one from Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30) comes dramatically close to *An Urgent Appeal*, both in strategy, content and impact.

The New Testament is not outdone, however. Consider the appeal to the banquet in Luke 14; or Jesus’ message to the seven churches of Asia Minor (in essence, seven “urgent appeals”); or Paul’s description of his own ministry in 2 Corinthians 5, where he uses a variety of Greek words—translated in the NIV as persuade, beg, appeal—to summarize his own campaign for spiritual revolution.

Of course, “*consensus*” and “*collaboration*” walk together naturally—one leads to the other; one requires the other. Further, you’ll notice the title focuses attention on both the “*nature*” and the “*hope*” of revival. “What should we expect revival to look like? And why should we expect God to grant it

at all?”—both questions beg reflection by thoughtful leaders. Finally, the title tells you that our focus is on *corporate* revival (which certainly carries personal implications), because this is where the weight of Scripture comes down on the topic.

### A CONCERN FOR CHRISTOLOGY

Of great importance, throughout the entire document you’ll find a continually enriched *Christology*. This is only to be expected because, as the treatise says in one place: “Revival is Christ!” The nature of it, and the hope for it, center around him exclusively. That’s what holds out the promise that leaders (and their people) may eventually find consensus and collaboration on the urgent, desperate need for revival in today’s church. As it says at one point:

Preeminently, all true revival is about God bringing glory back to his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit through his church . . . Biblical revival is supremely Son-centered. It is utterly Christ-dominated. Some have even called it a “Christ-awakening”. We can only think rightly about revival when we think rightly about Christ’s place in revival. He is the criterion by which we define it, measure its legitimacy, and vindicate its impact . . . To use another term, revival is about arrival—when, through the Spirit, Christ shows up afresh (as it were) to invade his church, to capture and conquer us anew, to re-energize us with his eternal purposes, and to take us with Him to fulfill them more fully than ever . . . Corporate revival, quite simply, is “the manifest presence of Christ.”

### WHAT CAN WE EXPECT TO HAPPEN AS WE USE IT?

On page five of the full-length document, four primary objectives for *An Urgent Appeal* are outlined. As you prepare to read the enclosed edited version here, it might be well for you to keep these goals in mind—especially as you consider the possibility of using it (in its full e-book form on our website) to help you be about fostering revival vision in your situation. It’s a way to get a conversation started on revival with serious Christians where you live. The objectives are:

1. *To establish a starting point for in-depth discussion on biblical revival by leaders of various denominational and ethnic backgrounds.*
2. *To promote and cultivate increased consensus among Christian leaders about what the Holy Spirit has said and is saying concerning corporate, biblical revival.*
3. *To provide common language and context for collaboration among Christian leaders to foster vision, prayer and preparation for revival throughout the Body of Christ.*
4. *To help preempt unnecessary chaos and division among leaders and their people, so that as God grants our prayers for revival we may serve it together.*

#### WHY CALL IT A CAMPAIGN?

But the uniqueness of this tool goes beyond the breadth of its vision or endorsement. *An Urgent Appeal* is not only a document—it is also a *movement*. One might even call it a *campaign*. At its heart, the vision of *An Urgent Appeal* is to be a catalyst to spark a “*conversation*” throughout the church on the issue of corporate revival—a dialogue that begins first with pastors and leaders and then eventually works its way into our congregations.

The National Revival Network (NRN) has cautioned that *An Urgent Appeal* is not so much a “primer” on revival (there are hundreds of good books on the subject), as it is a “*conversation starter*” on revival (providing a synthesis of insights from *many* students of revival). Through the use of inductive discussion questions at the close of each major section (in its original, unedited form), the appeal *honors* its readers. It assumes that many serious Christians today have given enough substantial thought to the topic of revival to be forming already valid biblical perspectives of their own. It’s the conviction of the NRN that the greatest need right now is to help leaders (first of all) identify for themselves, and then for each other, what they currently believe on the subject. We need to hear from each other, learn from each other, sharpen

each other. Just as critically, leaders must explore—certainly on this great theme above most others—the possibility of reaching sufficient *consensus* to allow us to join hands in *collaborating* (especially in local settings) toward a God-given corporate revival within all our churches and ministries.

To that end, the NRN has begun to develop *Urgent Appeal “Living Room Gatherings.”* Put simply, this is a half-day retreat in an intimate setting (preferably someone’s living room) to introduce the document to a handful of pastors and elders, to encourage immediate discussion of some of its issues and to spend extended prayer over what is shared. The primary goal of this one-time meeting is to form small *Urgent Appeal “Conversation Cells”* (an NRN term) made up of 3-4 leaders who meet for six weeks, to interact for one hour each week around the inductive questions at the end of the six major sections.

Once these six weeks are up, the “campaign” may take any number of additional steps. It depends on what each Conversation Cell determines about the degree of consensus they have reached. This might result, for example, in reconvening all the Conversation Cells and proceeding together in additional prayer and studies on revival.

Or each Cell might decide to test-drive some efforts at collaboration. One such activity, for example, might be an agreement jointly to set aside the same six weeks for every member pastor to preach a *biblical* perspective on each of the six sections in *An Urgent Appeal*. During that time, they would meet for an hour in-between Sundays to share results, to overview ideas for the next Sunday and to pray for one another and each congregation.

To help local pastors develop “*Living Room Gatherings*,” the NRN has just completed a one-hour video training tool available on CD-ROM as well as over [www.urgentappeal.net](http://www.urgentappeal.net). The curriculum is based on insights and approaches uncovered through successful gatherings conducted by NRN members. The CD-ROM can help anyone facilitate a half-day exploratory retreat.

*An Urgent Appeal* concludes with a one-page “*Declaration of Intent*.” It can help bring closure for a six-week Conversation

Cell. This is not another re-commitment device. As it says, it is a way for the readers to "declare" their desire to not only be *for* revival (many Christians are in favor of it), but also to be *about* revival—to be about the business of preaching it, praying for it, lobbying for its urgent need, and calling others to seek it with you. In other words, someone who is *about* revival will "get the conversation started" every chance they get.

### CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the primary purpose of *An Urgent Appeal* is to stimulate a collegiality among Christian leaders that's conducive to a theologically-sound reawakening to Christ within our churches and throughout our nation. It is the hope of all co-sponsors that we might experience in our generation what Scripture records for Hezekiah's "urgent appeal":

*They decided to send a proclamation [an urgent appeal] throughout Israel . . .*

*Couriers went throughout Israel and Judah*

*with letters from the king and his officials [leaders lead the way] . . .*

*The hand of God was on the people [Sovereign grace]*

*to give them unity of mind [consensus]*

*to carry out [collaboration] what the king and his officials had ordered,*

*following the word of the Lord [basis of the appeal] . . .*

*And God heard them, for their prayer reached Heaven [corporate revival].*

2 Chronicles 30: 5-6, 12, 27

### *Author*

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