



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

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“IT IS TIME FOR A REVIVAL” – 24th ANNIVERSARY MESSAGE TO THE UPCSA

The 26th of September is an ordinary day in the life of the world, but it is an extraordinary day for us in the UPCSA. It is the date on which our beloved UPCSA was born, out of the God-breathed union of two separate denominations. The union, itself, was “God’s doing, and it is marvelous in our sight.” In our UPCSA memory, the 26th of September is, in a special way, “the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:23-4). God brought the reconciliation and made us foundationally and fundamentally a reconciling church.

As we celebrate this 24th anniversary and our coming of age, we should pray for a spiritual renewal, emanating from a renewed move of the Spirit that revives the Church. Someone may ask for the what, the why, the when, the who and the how of this revival of the UPCSA. Think on these things...

1. THE WHAT

We take a leaf from Habakkuk who prayed:

“O Lord, I have heard of your renown; and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known; in wrath may you remember mercy.”
(Hab 3:2)

In this verse, the Hebrew word translated as “renew” or “revive” means “to bring back to life.” It is time to pray for God to bring back to life His people, to breathe new life into our churches, and to renew our spirits with God’s Spirit. We have not only heard of God’s renewal in our Church, we have also experienced God’s doing when He birthed the UPCSA.

Throughout the Bible and throughout history, men and women of God have been compelled to pray for and ask God for spiritual revival for their time. So, in our own time we pray, “Revive us O Lord”.

2. THE WHY

The General Assembly has for a few years now adopted the posture of “Going for Growth.” For growth, we need spiritual revival; revival that gives us mental health, structural health, missional health, and programmatic health. These can only happen where we are spiritually healthy and vibrant. Spirituality is the key to the success or advancement of the gospel, the message of the resurrection. Spirituality is the key to our mission.

There is a need for revival because in modern times, our priorities in the church have shifted and are now influenced by modern day priorities. Many parts of the church today suffer not only numerical decline, but also spiritual decline as demonstrated in the increase of immature, privatised and selfish models of doing church, not just in our region but globally.

It is time for a revival, a renewed spirituality. God, who birthed this denomination by giving us the vision of a union, is capable of sending us the revival that is needed to renew, grow and sustain the church today; revival not merely for our sake, but “for the glory of God’s own name” (Psalm 79: 9).

3. THE WHEN

A revival cannot be manufactured or generated by us, no matter how sophisticated or advanced we are. Revival is neither a well-organized evangelism campaign, program, nor a well-researched thesis. Revival is a gift that can only be given by God, in God’s sovereign timing. But all we ask with Habakkuk is “in our own time” and trust that the God of revival will bring it in God’s own way in our time.

We humbly affirm that, “*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going*” (John 3:8).

4. THE WHO

Revival is a corporate event. We have to seek for it together. We are 'stronger together' as a church. We have to practice the Christian unity that so often precedes and accompanies a revival. It was when "they (the believers) were all together in one place" that God sent them the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

J.D. Woodbridge in his book *A God-Sized Vision* said, "God leads his people to pray for that which he designs to give." We are those people – all of us. When we all pray together for a spiritual revival upon our church and upon our land, God will honour that because we are honouring God and recognizing that all power belongs to God.

Revival is gifted to believers who recognize and admit publicly that God is their only hope. It's time for us to admit that where we are now requires only God's intervention. Bearing in mind our context of southern Africa where we live and serve, we need to have a thirst and a hunger for God. The kind of thirst and hunger for God that comes from knowing the extent of our need in southern Africa.

5. THE HOW

While we pray for a revival, we must strike the right balance between pleading for God to do what only God can do, and work in the meantime to promote the church as a faithful minister of the gospel. Divine agency and human responsibility correspond beautifully to bring forth amazing results.

To pray for revival and then sit and do nothing would be a foolish type of spirituality. Instead, we follow the example of the person who prays for rain and then carries an umbrella. We continue to bring to reality our Church vision "To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ." We continue to fulfil our missional goals as a Church, and we continue to pray for the revival that we so need as a Church today.

And when God responds favourably, it is not to exalt earthly leaders, but to display the glory of God's name.

CONCLUSION

At this 24th anniversary of the UPCS, are you disillusioned about the denomination? Pray for revival, and let it start with you.

- Do you wish for a move of the Spirit in the UPCS? Pray for revival and follow Jesus.
- Are you critical or cynical about the quality of Christianity you are seeing around you? Pray for revival and serve the Lord with willingness.
- Are you tired of broken relationships and people not getting along in the UPCS? Pray for revival and build bridges.
- Are you desperate to see us fulfilling our vision to be a reconciled community? Pray for revival and encourage.
- Are you passionate about us displaying a stronger prophetic witness? Pray for revival and walk humbly with your God.

Brothers and sisters, pray for revival and allow God to use you. It is time for a revival, but it is "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6)

Your servant in the Lord,

Rt Rev LC Neshangwe
Moderator of the General Assembly