The word is out. Cells are multiplying. These are prayer cells born out of years of revival in Goiania, Goias, Brazil. In the mid 1990s, a spiritual transformation took place in Goiania, a city of 1.2 million, 126 miles from Brasilia. Evangelicals grew from seven percent to over 45 percent in seven years. The movement was very much characterized by prayer, especially among women who formed bands of intercessors.

Around 1990, five women began praying together for the city. Elizabeth Cornelio, a mother and housewife, one of the leaders of the prayer group, was told by her pastor not to pray with Christians from other churches. But, four years later, she began inviting other Christians from various churches to pray in unison for the city. For this, she was expelled from her church.

Eight hundred and fifty came together for the first combined prayer meeting. The movement grew rapidly with nearly 200,000 women praying every morning for the city. Elizabeth Cornelio’s daily radio broadcast brought targeted reports on criminal trends to intercessors. Together they prayed, and a city was changed. After prayer, women went out in the marketplace to pray, simply blessing those around them. When the program was cancelled for three months, the crime rate rose 40 percent. The mayor and chief of police asked that the program be reinstated. The crime rate receded. It was commonly said that the intercessors were ruling the city, not the mayor! Mobile prayer teams went door to door. Most weekends, around 150 people would be saved and a new church would begin.

As thousands prayed, every church in the city grew, and new churches were planted. Christians from one denomination prayed and fasted for 40 days at the end of 1998, and planted 372 new churches in January 1999 alone. As 90 local denominations worked together, thousands of prayer leaders were trained, and the flames of a prayer revival spread to other parts of Brazil. Ultimately, prayer cells were established throughout Brazil.

“Revival is a Lifestyle”

Today, the church in Goiania is known as a place where “revival is a lifestyle.” Churches have experienced phenomenal growth. One congregation in the city, the Universal Church of God’s Kingdom, has 80,000 members, seven million nationwide, and ten million worldwide. A 24-hour Mountain of Prayer draws many, and miracles are often reported.

What began by prayer is still spreading. Just as natural cells multiply, the prayer cell movement is rapidly growing beyond Brazil and Latin America to other parts of the world.

Carlos Oliveira of PrayerNet International is a revival preacher who comes out of a Goiania church of over 60,000 members. Now based in California, he works with Elizabeth Cornelio as prayer director of the National Intercession Network. Oliveira, who helps establish prayer cells worldwide, says:
"God has been doing awesome things, especially in Brazil. Many pastors are coming from different parts of the country to hear about and participate in what God is doing—prayer cells. They are embracing this vision and taking it to their cities.

“We have been now establishing an average of one prayer cell a day in Brazil and around the world. Amazingly, God has directed us to also establish prayer cells in schools and government agencies. So far, we have started one cell in a private elementary school and one in the treasury department of the state.

“In Nigeria, there’s a church that started a children’s prayer cell. We have started church prayer cells in Nigeria, Kenya, and Pakistan, and are in the process of starting cells also in Taiwan, Togo, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Angola. Soon, we will have church prayer cells in Hong Kong and Germany.”

Unlike private prayer groups, the prayer cells cover each other in prayer and pray for the whole network. They may be city prayer cells or church prayer cells, but all are encouraged to meet once a week to pray for revival and for their area’s specific needs. Firmly convinced that prayer makes the difference, Oliveira says, “The most successful churches/ministries in the whole world are those that have ongoing prayer covering.”

Have You Thought?
What began as a small group of women gathering to pray has changed a city, a nation, and the world. Allow God to grow the “small beginnings” in your life.

Transformation Moment
In all our prayer let us remember the lesson the Saviour would teach us this day, that if there is one thing on earth we can be sure of, it is this, that the Father desires to have us filled with His Spirit, that He delights to give us His Spirit.

“And when once we have learned thus to believe for ourselves, and each day to take out of the treasure we hold in heaven, what liberty and power to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church of God, on all flesh, on individuals, or on special efforts! He that has once learned to know the Father in prayer for himself, learns to pray most confidently for others too. The Father gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, not least, but most, when they ask for others” (Andrew Murray in Lord, Teach Us to Pray).