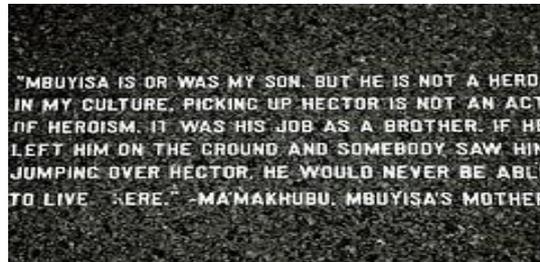




“BECAUSE IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO”

Hector Pieterse being carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo after being shot by South African police. His sister, Antoinette Sithole runs beside them



Dear fellow covenanters,

In August I attended two conferences.

The first being the **World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women's Conference** which was held in Johannesburg. I was in Johannesburg for 8 days and while I was there had the opportunity to visit the Mandella museum, the Hector Peterson Museum, and the Apartheid Museum as well as having the privilege to visit Soweto, and experience vibrant African worship from West, South and East Africa. I felt especially moved by my visit to the Hector Peterson Museum.

There was a comment on a marble slab that was the response from Mbuyisa's parents who said that their son could do no less, it was their culture to be his brother's keeper.

I hear it said many times that “we are all equal”. Sounds right, but is it really equality? When one sector of the Australian population's life expectancy is 20 years less, or when the rate of suicides is 4 times higher in Aboriginal communities than that of the general population?

Many Australians distance themselves from Aboriginal issues; some say the issues are not relevant to them or their communities.

My hope is that our Aussie digger heritage and good values of mateship as reflected in Mbuyisa's act of brotherhood will stir our sleeping consciences to **“do the right thing because it is the right thing to do”**.

The other conference I attended was a UAICC Indigenous Theology conference that was held on the NSW coast at Ballina. Dr Gary Devereux, a teacher of systematic theology from Melbourne, raised an interesting point about, **“How do we decolonize as a nation? as communities? as an individual?”**

His use of the word “decolonisation” to describe being set free from controlling powers brought a new found freedom for me to rediscover my understanding of Aboriginal spirituality. He used the story of the children of Israel being set free from Pharaoh's controlling power and we also explored ways that Jesus set free the demon possessed man (Legion) from Gadara.

I hope this leaves you with some food for thought. If you have any thoughts of your own please feel free to share them with us

Peace be with you.

Denise

It is not too late for About FACE

Extension date for applications for About Face program, now **October 14th** (although they are a little bit flexible) **About FACE** takes place from **7-27 January 2012**. More information can be found through contacting the About FACE office: p. (03) 9251 5271 e. info@aboutface.org.au www.aboutface.org.au **Is your congregation sponsoring a young person? Note: About FACE now accepts older participants. Please enquire.**

You are invited to Ceremony at Salisbury

Rev Dean Whittaker will be inducted as the new (old) minister for the Congress congregation at Bedwin St, Salisbury on October 26th at 7.30pm. Covenanters will remember Dean as a previous minister (deacon) at Salisbury before he resigned to go to the Northern Territory. Also Rev Wali Fejo will be farewelled from MAP (Mobile Aboriginal Patrol shared with Frontier services) and Denise Champion will be commissioned as the Congress State Development Officer. **You are invited to help celebrate on this occasion.**

APY UNCONFUSED !

*Recent reports on the APY Lands have stirred up a media frenzy about health and other issues on the APY Lands in South Australia. As often happens in these cases it is hard for people reading these reports to separate fact from fiction. Jonathan Nicholls is manager of Indigenous policy at UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide and the author of **Paper Tracker** which documents Government promises and tracks the implementation process. He and others have spoken out*

UnitingCare Wesley says comments [made regarding the APY lands] are a simplistic and knee-jerk reaction to complex problems.

UnitingCare Wesley's manager of Indigenous policy, Jonathan Nicholls, says **Aboriginal people have a need and right to live successful lives in their traditional country.**

"People in those communities are frustrated that the usual suspects who don't live in those communities, who often live on the east coast of Australia, are making pronouncements on their behalf without having gone out and spoken to those communities and found out the situation for themselves," he said.

"The suggestion that they can be yanked out of their traditional country, where they have been for thousands of years, and somehow that will make a significant difference, is quite ridiculous."

Mr Nicholls said more could be done to help the outback people take control of their lives.

"There are not a lot of jobs out in those communities, but more could be created," he said.

"At the moment what's happening is people are sitting in their communities, surrounded by government programs and people who drive in and out and tell them 'It must be this way, it must be that way'."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-09-22/report-illuminates-youth-suicide-rates/2911316>

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the mistakes being made in the Northern Territory Intervention may be repeated on the APY Lands. Aboriginal communities are culturally and linguistically different. The Central Desert people are not the same as those on Cape York which are different also from those in Arnhem Land. To treat each community with the same medicine without seriously talking to the patient is plainly stupid. As Jonathan indicates above the answer is in communication with the people themselves in the language they understand and providing the tools and knowledge that will enable them to take control of their own lives and communities.

This has been partly successful on the APY lands but still has a long way to go. The recent media attention has thrown a spotlight on issues that have been largely ignored by the wider community and the SA Government is, I believe, resisting the impulse to take knee jerk action without consultation with communities. We need to pray that communication involves truly listening for understanding from inside the cultural context.

The same message is coming from the Uniting Church in the Northern Territory.

"Government reports continue to tell how things are not working to close the gap for Aboriginal people. We did not need the reports to tell us this. The gap will only close when Aboriginal people are empowered and can take control of their own lives. For them to be empowered they need access to good information in their own language. The message is simple but nobody seems to be able to understand it.

Service after service is rolled out to help the people but all these service providers have one thing in common; they **cannot communicate** with their Yolŋu clients. **Why don't we have a service that closes the gap on communication?"** (from Why Warriors News, September 20110 - see www.whywarriors.com.au)

Pride of place is wiped out by welfare

Rev Bill Edwards was Superintendent of Ernabella Mission from 1958 until 1972, when it was run by the Presbyterian Church. Bill is now a retired Uniting Church minister who is still active as a part-time lecturer at the University of South Australia and has acted as a Pitjantjatjara translator for the courts. His observations provide insights into how communities have become dysfunctional which also gives clues to solving the problem. Bill reinforces the message about proper consultation and the importance of creating employment opportunities that are local, sustainable and meaningful in the context of the local culture.

FIFTY years ago I sat in the shade of a mulga tree near Officer Creek in the far northwest of South Australia observing work being done to supply infrastructure for a new settlement for Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara people.



That settlement, which opened in October 1961, was Fregon, a place that has been in the news recently with reports of starving children; reports that have been exaggerated. Returning to my home at Ernabella Mission, 60km northeast of Fregon, I recorded my observations, which were published as a feature article in Adelaide's *The Advertiser* on September 23, 1961. Fregon was established as a cattle outstation of Ernabella Mission, of which I was then the superintendent.

After 34 years of mission settlement at Ernabella, firewood and water supplies were being depleted by an increasing population. Thus Fregon was designed as a step in

decentralisation to relieve these pressures and to provide employment in cattle work. In that period it was customary for young men to work as stockmen on nearby cattle stations.

At Ernabella the sheep industry was the main source of employment; families worked as shepherds at the various wells and bores and men were employed as shearers. Younger men found cattle work more exciting and fulfilling than working with sheep. While many of the residents at Ernabella came from the mountain range country, which extended west along the SA-Northern Territory border, others belonged traditionally to the sandhill country to the south of the ranges. Fregon provided a base for those sandhill people.

In that era, prior to the 1967 referendum that gave the commonwealth power to expend finance on Aboriginal programs in the states, there was limited financial support for the running of Ernabella and Fregon. For example, in 1959, the annual budget for Ernabella was \$9600. Staff salaries were paid direct from Sydney. While these salaries were well below standard rates for those employed in similar occupations, staff members worked willingly with a sense of dedication and commitment to the cause of Aboriginal training and advancement.



The SA government provided limited supplies to enable distribution of basic foodstuffs to older people and child endowment was paid direct to the mission to provide meals for schoolchildren and infants. Workers received two meals a day in the dining hall, clothing and a small cash wage. This food was supplemented by hunting and gathering traditional foods. When I read the present references to lettuces costing \$7 in the stores, I recall the people once despising them as *rapitaku mai*, rabbit food. Most of the women at Ernabella and Fregon received food, clothing and small cash returns through the handcraft industry: the older ones spun wool by a traditional method and younger women used this fibre to make hooked and woven rugs, and painted designs on cards and fabrics. The bread consumed in the dining hall was made by local women.

Only four staff members were initially stationed at Fregon: an overseer, cattleman, teacher and nursing sister. Three photographs that illustrated my 1961 article are revealing in retrospect as they show Aboriginal men operating the water-drilling plant, erecting a water tank on a high stand and laying water pipes. The article referred to other men making cement blocks, carting sand, mixing cement, clearing dead timber and establishing a vegetable garden.



The article concluded with the following aim: "It is planned that later returns from the sale of cattle will provide capital for further development towards the ultimate aim of ensuring economic security for these Pitjantjatjara people, a security to be gained as a reward from their own labours."

The Anangu people who did much of the work at Ernabella and Fregon were able to do this not because they had attended TAFE or other courses, but as a result of their close working relationship with the few staff members, observing and copying what they were doing, which reflected the

principal method of traditional Aboriginal education. Later in the 1960s, men and women from Ernabella and Fregon gained employment picking fruit in the Riverland region of SA.

While this program proved very successful in its early years, it ended after government departments took over its administration and less care was taken in the selection of workers.

Some success was also achieved at Ernabella in the late 60s and early 70s with families running the bakery and butcher shop. Recent reports refer to new houses having no furniture and the Salvation Army making beds in Adelaide and transporting them to communities, only to find they are kept in storage. I recall times in the early 60s when the clinic required a bed or the school some cupboards: I would measure the timber and young men would make the furniture.

The work at Fregon showed promise in its early years, with men working as stockmen, constructing fences and erecting windmills and squatters' tanks at the bores. In 1974, the Presbyterian Church handed over administration of Ernabella and Fregon to local incorporated community councils in the hope that further progress would be made.

During the 70s and 80s, I visited Fregon frequently as superintendent of Ernabella-Fregon and later as minister of the Pitjantjatjara parish of the Uniting Church, based at Amata. My abiding memory is of a place that very much belonged to the Anangu people and of which they were proud



Without a vehicle we'd lay the bricks in lines to dry.

However in the 70s, widespread changes throughout the world had effects on Aboriginal communities. The increasing welfare economy undermined the motivation to be engaged in work projects. Changes in methods of handling cattle in the pastoral industry lessened opportunities for men to be employed as stockmen.

As the amount of commonwealth money for Aboriginal programs increased dramatically, there were stricter controls on, for example, building standards, and an escalation in staff numbers as jobs once done by local people were performed by imported labour. **Previously, Anangu men had made bricks, mixed cement and, under the supervision of one builder, had erected their houses and other buildings. By the 90s most building work was performed by outside contractors.**

Younger people no longer had the strong models their fathers and uncles had previously provided as stockmen, shearers, gardeners and brickmakers.

Several became victims to the lures of petrol sniffing, cannabis, alcohol abuse and associated social, health and legal problems. Older people now had access to pensions but were often encouraged by younger relatives to gamble and lose their cash, which was then used to purchase alcohol.

It has saddened me to see many of my contemporaries lose their children and grandchildren to motor accidents, alcohol and drug-fuelled violence, suicide and modern lifestyle illnesses. As an interpreter in Pitjantjatjara, I have dealt with incidents that have resulted in cases of long-term hospitalisation and incarceration in the prison system.



Bill Edwards
Ernabella Mission (1958-1972)

Having observed the effects of increased government spending on Aboriginal programs in the 70s, I formulated a revision of the then popular Parkinson's law in the following terms: "*The effectiveness of programs for Aboriginal advancement is in inverse proportion to the amount of government finance expended on them.*" So much of the budget was spent on salaries, motor vehicles and housing for non-Aboriginal staff. This is not to let governments off the financial hook, but to urge that past wastefulness be curtailed and steps taken to **ensure a high percentage of funding goes towards Aboriginal employment.**

Whereas under mission administration there was a degree of coordination across all aspects of community life, including employment, education, health, stores and recreation, in remote communities now there are several government departments and NGOs, as well as the community council, involved in planning and service delivery. This often leads to confusion and duplication. School principals, struggling with the problem of declining attendance rates, have complained that the provision of vehicles by other government departments to enable community members to travel to other centres for sporting carnivals has encouraged children to absent themselves from school.

While the policy, as espoused by Charles Rowley in the 60s, of transferring authority to local community councils appeared to be the appropriate one in that age of post-colonialism, it did not take sufficient account of Aboriginal authority structures. Under mission and early community control, the cattle industry at Fregon prospered. The spread of brucellosis and bovine TB throughout central Australia in the late 70s hindered this progress. As cattle were again introduced, families sought to establish their own small herds on limited areas, rather than support a community-based industry.

When I read a comment by an American anthropologist that George Bush's problem in Iraq was that he sought to impose democracy on a clan-based society, it struck a chord, as I observed the difficulties arising when family

loyalties and disputes undermined the effectiveness of community councils. The perseverance of traditional values and obligations has proved inimical to progress in the realms of political and financial independence. The influx of considerable sums of money through sales of art has done little or nothing towards building financial and social capital to ensure a more prosperous and independent future for residents of remote communities.

The recent reports about Fregon and other similar communities refer to children being hungry, the high price of foodstuffs in local stores, emergency food being provided by Red Cross, newly constructed houses having no furniture, and the continuing problems related to school attendance.

These reports highlight the need for strong, co-ordinated action based on comprehensive and deep consultation with all concerned parties. This may involve some form of income management. Sniping at ministers of Aboriginal affairs will serve no positive purpose. These ministries have long been a poisoned chalice.

As I look through my files of past decades, I come across similar headlines to those appearing today. Unless rewarding, fulfilling and demanding employment programs are planned and implemented in these communities, our descendants will be reading similar headlines in another 50 years and remote Aboriginal people will remain in a state of dependency.

Bill Edwards, September 24, 2011 - photos from "Ernabella No Ordinary Mission" Compass ABCTV

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/pride-of-place-is-wiped-out-by-welfare/story-e6frg6z6-1226144278492>

Hawker About FACE Stepping Stone Event



As she was going home from Hawker one of the excited teenagers said, "This was the best weekend of my life!"

The weekend in question was in late July when a group of 18 people from Adelaide, Burra and Port Augusta visited Hawker in the Flinders Ranges for the second About Face Stepping Stone event for 2012 organized by Congress in partnership with the Young Adults unit of the SA Uniting Church.

On the Friday evening after making camp we were joined for dinner by our Adnyamathanha hosts: Pauline Mckenzie from Hawker, Colleen Ryan from Port Augusta and her sister, our Covenanting Coordinator, Denise Champion. They welcomed us to country, "Nunga," and introduced us to a different world immediately by teaching us words from

their language.

On the Saturday we were joined by six "yakadi's" (children and grandchildren) of our hosts, who also enjoyed participating in sharing their language and culture with us.

Saturday was a wonderful day with a visit to Sacred Canyon and a late barbeque lunch at Wilpena Pound, where we were joined by other campers. Prayer through the giving of thanks for the food brought us together.

That night we enjoyed (except those who were vegetarian) kangaroo tail soup cooked by Auntie Denise, and singing around the campfire which was led by Adam Cousens (who came across from Victoria with Tess Keam – one of the organizers of the About FACE program) with support from Jadon, one of Auntie Pauline's grandsons.

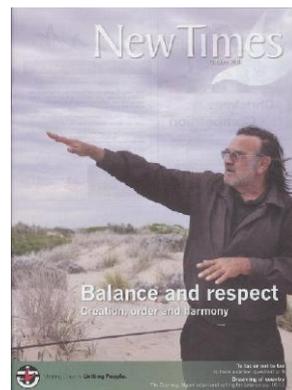
On Sunday morning a special reflection and worship time was held including readings from the Aussie Bible. Participants felt they had stepped out and just knocked on the door at the beginning of their "About Face" journey. One of the participants summed it up in the reflection time with the comment. **"I was really struck by the way God reveals himself not only through**



his word, but also his amazing creation, and the culture he instils within people.”
May there be many more steps taken on the journey!

Coorong About FACE Stepping Stone Event

On 2-4 September, 13 Uniting Church people headed to the Coorong for Stepping Stone, a cross-cultural experience within our own state. The short weekend away was designed as a foretaste of About FACE, a three week Faith And Cultural Exchange program for over 18s to connect with Congress Aboriginal communities around Australia. Arriving at Camp Coorong on Friday evening, the group mixed easily with each other, some staying up late sharing ideas on life, church and the state of relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. On Saturday, Ngarrindjeri Elders, Tom Trevor and Major Sumner, began to explain what it was like to grow up in Ngarrindjeri country, learning their own customs and culture, while being pushed out of their natural habitats by colonisation and farming



The weekend was a truly cross-cultural experience. So much was unfamiliar for the city-dwellers; the dependence and relationship to the land, the seasonal movement of the people, a generosity of spirit with the earth - allowing it be fruitful and not making demands of it beyond measure. In the lead up to About FACE, this event prompted an awareness that we live on and share land which has traditional owners, who must be revered for their understanding of how to live on a land they have intuitive insights of. We have much to learn about balance and harmony with the land from our country's traditional owners. And now, with our world groaning in discomfort under our human weight, there is no time more important to do so. (from New Times October 2011 with permission)



Read the whole story with lots of photos in the latest “New Times” <http://sa.uca.org.au/new-times-home.html>

A submission to the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians

You may be aware that the Australian Government, as part of it’s commitment to pursuing constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, appointed an Expert Panel, Co-Chaired by Professor Patrick Dodson and Mr Mark Leibler AC. The Panel consists of 20 respected and accomplished individuals, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and community leaders, constitutional experts and parliamentary members.

The Panel is tasked with leading a broad national consultation program to seek views from across the Australian community about ideas for recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in our nation’s Constitution.

The Expert Panel will report to the Government on possible options for constitutional change to give effect to Indigenous constitutional recognition, including advice as to the level of support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader community for each option by December 2011.

Mr Mick Gooda and Ms Megan Davis, members of the Expert Panel, held public consultations in Adelaide on 22 August 2011.

Submission to the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians

The Key Elements to Constitutional Reform are:

1. Recognising the first peoples of Australia and therefore once and for all repudiating 'terra nullius'.
2. Removing ss25 and 51 (xxvi) from the Constitution so they cannot be used to discriminate against the first peoples.

These two elements should be non-negotiable.

3. If it is possible to insert a guarantee of non-discrimination on the grounds of race this should be done.
4. In addition and in an appropriate way that would have bi-partisan support there should be some way of supporting Treaty making with the first peoples such that treaties so made and agreed to cannot be made to the detriment of the first peoples, are legally binding on both parties and can't be interfered with by patronising politicians.

There are three factors (1) that mitigate against the fair treatment of the first Australians: charity, paternalism and control.

Charity seeks to lessen social problems without any clear commitment or strategy to eradicate them.

Paternalism makes us imagine that we of the dominant culture can fix the problems of the marginalised which among other things leads to a failure to equip those oppressed to solve their own problems.

Control needs of the dominant culture means nothing really changes.

Only by forcing the dominant culture's government into true partnerships through a Treaty arrangement can these factors be overcome. Examples of partnerships already exist but they are few and far between. (2)

As Australia is a signatory to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. An enactment of these rights constitutionally would not only benefit the first peoples but would give basic human rights protection to all Australians (3).

The Uniting Church in Australia has recently completed a consultation process which began in 2009 and culminated last year and the beginning of this year with the agreement to a preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution that recognises the first peoples (4). The addition of a preamble also required changes to the main body of the UCA constitution for it to have substance.

I suggest that the expert panel look at this process and text as part of its deliberations. The Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress as parties to this constitutional change will be making their own submissions shortly. If the panel wishes to seek further information about this, then you will have the opportunity to hear from and question these bodies when they make their submissions.

Attempts to change the constitution have been rarely successful. It is imperative that the processes leading up to a change must be carefully managed, worded and have widespread support.

There will never be any chance of full reconciliation until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are recognised in the Law of the land and that their rights as people and citizens of this country are fully guaranteed and protected.

And until that happens 'closing the gap' will never be successful.

May I wish this expert panel every success in its endeavours to bring recognition and rights in the law to this nation's first peoples.

Peter Russell

Secretary, Covenanting Committee, Presbytery & Synod of the Uniting Church in South Australia

22 August 2011

References

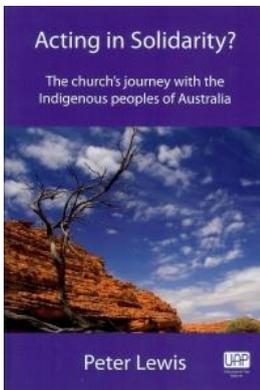
1. Meyers quoted in Peter Lewis, Acting in Solidarity, Uniting Academic Press Melbourne 2010, page 198
2. Inserting agreement making powers is mentioned as Idea 7 in your Discussion paper. The Covenant between the UCA and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress is an example of an enduring and dynamic partnership.
3. Something like this incorporating statements of values is mentioned on p17 of your Discussion paper.
4. Revised Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/the-revised-preamble>

Acting in Solidarity?

The Church's Journey with the Indigenous People Of Australia

From the beginning, the churches played a significant role in the coming of Europeans to Australia. Integrated within the increasingly dominant culture, their attitudes towards the original inhabitants of the continent were, at the very least, ambiguous.



This book traces the history of their involvement, with a particular focus on the Uniting Church whose former constituents (Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches) has a considerable presence among the Aboriginal peoples. He examines the Uniting Church's serious efforts to come to terms with its colonial past, seeking to understand previous failures, trying to find ways of being a church truly reconciled to its Indigenous members.

In this deeply theological reflection, the author urges us to take seriously the Bible's condemnation of Empire and suggests that all the churches consider how they can overcome their colonial demons and engage productively with the realities of Indigenous peoples.

Peter Lewis *Acting in Solidarity? The Church's Journey with the Indigenous People Of Australia* Uniting Academic Press Melbourne 2010 RRP \$39.95

Peter Lewis was National Director for Covenanting in the Uniting Church from 1999-2004 and is currently Manager of Policy, Research and Communication at the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. He has a Doctorate in Theology from the Melbourne College of Divinity.

Prayer Points

- Pray for the **Umeewarra Nguraritja** group and **Lavene Ngatokorua**, representing children of the stolen generation who grew up in the Umeewarra Children's Home in Port Augusta as they seek support to save their heritage.
- Pray for the **Kalparrin Community**. Pray also for the worshipping community, the children and the leadership of Jordan Sumner.
- Pray for the **Salisbury Congress Congregation**, and newly appointed minister, **Rev Dean Whittaker**, as they embark on a new era of ministry. Pray for the service on October 26th.
- Pray for the Aboriginal people in **Port Augusta** representing many nations and all Aboriginal people across Australia. Pray that they might find employment, enjoy good health and be able to access appropriate educational opportunities.
- Pray that governments stop forcing "reforms" against Aboriginal people's rights and against the evidence (e.g. bi-lingual education works). Pray that **true listening will occur** when consulting.
- Pray for all **Aboriginal children going to school or not going**. Pray that **equitable funding is provided for ALL schools** and that solutions may be found for those children not attending.
- Pray for **justice and a 'fair go'** for Aboriginal people and the 'unfinished business' of reconciliation.
- **Pray for a Treaty.**

Shalom,

Denise

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Note: The Covenanting Coordinator position is only half time. Office hours are usually in the first half of the week, Tuesday to Wednesday when not out and about. The Covenanting Coordinator is able to preach at Services, and talk to Church Councils, Bible Study and Fellowship Groups. For further details contact the Covenanting Coordinator. This and past copies of this newsletter may be downloaded from the website:

<http://mrm.sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/covenanting-whats-new.html>

If this newsletter has been forwarded to you and you wish to be included on the regular Covenanter's Email Newsletter List please email (Peter Russell: prussell@sa.uca.org.au) your request.

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