

MEDIA STATEMENT

Sunday 10 April 2016

Sunday Star Times report on ‘Exclusive Brethren’ a mishmash of innuendo, old myths and falsehoods

A report in today’s Sunday Star Times – Brethren ‘Hate world, pray for IRD’ – is short on facts and rich on innuendo.

The article contains numerous errors and attempts to imply that the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (known previously as the Exclusive Brethren) has used New Zealand tax laws to line its members’ pockets and that of its leaders.

The article provides not a scintilla of evidence to support its thesis and instead relies in part on the testimony of a New Zealand academic who clearly has scant knowledge of the Church or its members and a former member who left the fellowship several years ago as a young man.

Amongst the falsehoods are claims:

- New Zealand Brethren members pay large amounts of donations direct to the Church’s leader, Mr Bruce Hales **(FACT: They don’t)**;
- Mr Hales is “immensely rich from his share in Exclusive business(es)” **(FACT: The Church does not own businesses. Mr Hales does not own shares in Church members’ businesses)**;
- A “web of businesses and charitable trusts” has been “very cunningly devised” to reduce taxes **(FACT: The Church and its members’ businesses operate strictly under the tax laws of New Zealand)**; and
- A buying group established by Church members “cream savings” that are paid to the Church **(FACT: It doesn’t)**.

The report contains the usual long-discredited nonsense that Church members are discouraged from having contact with outsiders and that schools attended by Church children exacerbate isolation and bigotry.

Church members run businesses dealing with people of all faiths. They employ many non-Brethren; serve customers and purchase goods and services from suppliers drawn from the wider community.

Further, the Church’s charitable arm, the Rapid Relief Team, provided assistance at 57 events in New Zealand in 2015.

The RRT is a volunteer, not-for-profit organisation that supports local communities in times of need. Staffed by volunteers drawn from members of the Church, the RRT serves food and drinks to emergency services personnel, helps out at homeless missions and supports work for other charities. It is also active in Australia, North America and the United Kingdom



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Plymouth Brethren
Christian Church

Our schools are very secular in nature. There is no religious instruction. There are no religious decorations, art works or posters anywhere in the schools.

Each school is registered and accredited by education authorities. The requisite curriculum in each country is followed and teaching methods are approved by Government authorities. There are regular inspections by government departments with academic results significantly higher than the national average. All teachers are from outside the Brethren community, tertiary-educated professionals and qualified.

A fuller rebuttal of claims made in the Sunday Star Times article appear on the following pages

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	Sunday Star Times	Church Response
1.	Contact with outsiders is discouraged.	<p>This is incorrect. Church members run businesses dealing with people of all faiths. They employ many non-Brethren; serve customers and purchase goods and services from suppliers drawn from the wider community.</p> <p>As Bevan Hurley was told before writing his article, the Church's charitable arm, the Rapid Relief Team, provided assistance at over 57 events in New Zealand in 2015.</p> <p>The RRT is a volunteer, not-for-profit organisation that supports local communities in times of need. Staffed by volunteers drawn from members of the Church, the RRT serves food and drinks to emergency services personnel, helps out at homeless missions and supports work for other charities.</p> <p>It is also active in Australia, North America and the United Kingdom</p> <p>Recent NZ events include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auckland's RRT supported the Cancer Society's 18-hour Relay for Life at Bruce Pulman Park in Takanini. RRT helped them set up their event and supplied approx. 1000 water bottles and free meals to the volunteers. • Providing assistance at the 2015 Waikakaho Valley Fire, near Blenheim https://www.facebook.com/420867801447686/videos/427609697440163/ • Hastings' RRT Team supported the U-Turn Trust open its new Flaxmere Boxing Academy premises. The Flaxmere Boxing Academy was the latest venture for the U-Turn Trust and was designed to feed the optimism, build the self-esteem, pride and confidence of local youth. RRT cooked some 450 sausage sandwiches. • See here a recent example of RRT helping out in Wanganui http://www.nzherald.co.nz/wanganui-chronicle/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503426&objectid=11583840 <p>The PBCC played a role assisting emergency services personnel in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes by serving meals to the rescue base at Latimer Square providing up 2100 meals per day to over 700 rescue personnel in the first week or so after the February earthquake.</p> <p>You can learn more here: http://www.rapidreliefteam.org/</p>
2.	Former Brethren member Craig Hoyle said the schools exacerbated the isolationism and	<p>This is complete nonsense.</p> <p>Our schools are very secular in nature. There is no religious instruction. There are no religious decorations, art works or posters anywhere in the schools.</p>

	bigotry of those who grow up in the religion.	<p>The Church believes strongly that school should be about learning. Our children attend church meetings during the week outside school time so it is unnecessary to include religious instruction as part of the school curriculum.</p> <p>Each school is registered and accredited by relevant education authorities. The requisite curriculum in NZ is followed and teaching methods are approved by Government authorities. There are regular inspections by government departments with academic results significantly higher than the national average.</p> <p>All teachers are from outside the Brethren community, tertiary- educated professionals and qualified.</p>
3.	It's understood New Zealand Brethren members pay large amounts of donations direct to Hales.	This is utterly false. Bevan Hurley never put these allegations to the Church prior to publication.
4.	In 2015, Hales said a mentally unstable New Zealand Brethren member who was in contact with excommunicated members – known as "opposers" – should 'drink rat poison'.	<p>As Bevan Hurley was told, Mr Hales did not say any person should drink rat poison.</p> <p>Mr Hales was using a metaphor to illustrate that used to describe the effect on a person coming into contact with another person whose beliefs and values are different from their own and potentially damaging.</p> <p>It is hardly unusual for a preacher or minister in any religion to warn a congregation to avoid people who extol certain beliefs and that those beliefs are 'poison'.</p>
5.	The web of businesses and charitable trusts run by church members, which give money back to the Australian leadership, have been "very cunningly devised" to reduce its tax bill.	<p>As Bevan Hurley was told prior to publication, each business is owned by individuals or their families. They are not owned by the Church and all after-tax profits are retained by business owners and spent at their discretion.</p> <p>Business owners do not give money back to the Australian leadership".</p> <p>Due to the poor use of grammar in this sentence, it is unclear what "its tax bill" refers to. It can't be the Church as it is an unincorporated entity and pays no tax. If it refers to businesses owned by individual church members or the individuals themselves, those businesses and individuals operate strictly under the tax laws of New Zealand and Australia. There is nothing "cunningly devised".</p>
6.	"My understanding is that this business organisation is owned	It is unclear what "business organisation" this refers to. The Church owns no businesses. Mr Hales owns his own business. Other Brethren business owners do not pay money or shares of profits to Mr Hales. It is absurd to suggest Mr Hales

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	<p>and directed by the "man of God", and that thus Bruce Hales is immensely rich from his share in Exclusive business as well as monitoring all their telephone calls."</p>	<p>monitors the phone calls of other businesses owned by Church members.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Growing up in the church, Craig Hoyle says his family would always buy their gas at BP, do their shopping at Countdown, and buy flights from Air NZ, with the church business creaming the savings.</p>	<p>Mr Hoyle would be referring to discounts available to Church members through a buying group established by the Universal Business Team – a consulting firm established by a group of Church members to provide training and advice to business owners. UBT has no legal connection with the Church and is not owned by the Church. A travel company, also established by some Church members and again with no legal connection with the Church, qualifies for bulk buying discounts and passes savings on to subscribers like any other travel agency does for their commercial customers.</p> <p>Neither the Church nor UBT cream any savings, which are for the benefit of individual church members and/or businesses they own.</p>