

PLYMOUTH BRETHREN CHRISTIAN CHURCH RESPONSE TO FOUR CORNERS QUESTIONS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Re: voting/politics

In a video filmed before the last election, a member of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, Amy Trewarn nee Struthers (*below*), says on camera that it is against her religious beliefs to vote, even though she is handing out how to vote cards. You have said publicly that members do now vote, but some choose to abstain. What religious basis is there for abstaining from voting?

The religious basis for this belief is in Romans 13. While this has always been about personal beliefs, traditionally most of us did not vote for this reason. That said, over the past few decades, practices and norms in our church have evolved like in any other church. In the same period, for example, you have seen fewer Catholics observing Lent or abstaining from meat on Fridays.

One of the changes we have seen over time, is more of our members apparently choosing to vote and even volunteer for political parties. It is important that this democratic right be respected, while the right of those to abstain on religious grounds remains protected.

Why do members of your church - who do not believe in voting - hand out how to vote cards?

That's their decision, not one for the church. Some don't vote on religious grounds, some don't vote but do participate in elections in other ways, some do both. It is their individual decision.

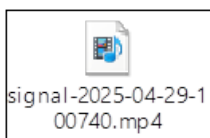
Why did you send out scripts of instructions to volunteers who were voting? Should they be able to answer questions honestly rather than by reference to a script provided by the church?

Late in the election campaign, there were hundreds of media stories about the fact that some members of our church were participating in the election campaign.

Headlines [like](#) '*What's going on?: Why the Exclusive Brethren are out in force this election*' were plastered in many mainstream news outlets.

As an aside, imagine the outrage if the word 'Jews' or 'Muslims' were substituted into that headline, or people from those communities were being asked their religion when handing out for a political party.

These headlines resulted in multiple reports of our parishioners being questioned and harassed. See one example, filmed by one of our members here:



The church did not issue transcripts to parishioners on what to say when questioned or abused, but are aware that some members who were involved in the election did.

We don't blame them.

Subsequently, Prime Minister Mr Anthony Albanese asked: “*what’s the quid pro quo here?*” Was there a “*quid pro quo*” for the Brethren sending out members to volunteer for the Coalition?

Based on media reports, we are aware that multiple members of our church supported multiple political parties and MPs. The church didn't organise or offer any of this, nor was it promised anything in return.

What do you say to the description by Prime Minister Albanese before the last federal election that the PBCC is “*a cult*”?

We are sure Mr Albanese didn't deliberately make those comments at a primary school which was attended that day by five children from our church.

As we [said at the time](#), those kids and their families were offered counselling and other assistance by both the school and church, and have now returned to normal education.

We wrote to Mr Albanese and Labor Headquarters on multiple occasions before and after the stories broke, but have not ever heard back. We don't wish to comment further.

Do you agree with the assessment of many former members and others familiar with the PBCC that it is a cult?

No. This is answered here: <https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/our-members/any-questions/#why-do-people-reference-the-pbcc-as-a-cult?-are-you>

Does the PBCC and/or its members - and/or companies associated with it - have a policy of donating to parties below the reportable threshold to avoid scrutiny? If not a policy, does it (or its entities or members) do this as a matter of course?

Your question is conflating the beliefs of individual members of our church, the businesses of individual church members, and the church itself. The church does not make political donations and does not support political parties or individual candidates.

There are no companies associated with the church. This would be like suggesting that a business owned by a Catholic person, is a Catholic business. It's not true. Whether individuals or businesses choose to support politicians or political parties, and the type of support, and the amount of support, is entirely a matter for them.

If any individuals or businesses did make donations above the disclosure threshold, one would assume they will be reported in the normal way - but again this is a matter for them.

What is your response to the announcement by the federal parliament this week that it will conduct a parliamentary inquiry into the 2025 federal election, which will include the activities of Brethren members at polling booths?

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters conducts the same type of inquiry after every election. We saw in the Committee's media release the statement that:

"Voters, volunteers and officials should never feel intimidated, harassed or have such an experience that they are discouraged from participating at future elections."

Many of the members of our church reported being hounded about their religion on booths, videos by MPs and chased by journalists, so we agree with this statement.

Re: Mr Mick Dover

- **What is your response to the allegations by Mick Dover that he was brutally raped and sexually abused over a decade from the age of five by three PBCC members?**
- **What is your response to the allegation by Mick Dover that he told at least 75 people about his abuse within the church, including current church officials, and that nothing was done and the police were not called?**
- **Why, when offering a one million dollar financial settlement to former PBCC member Mick Dover, did the PBCC insist on a non-disclosure agreement and a non-disparagement clause?**
- **What do you say to the claim that it is corrosive and retraumatizing to prevent a person from discussing their childhood trauma by buying their silence?**

This matter is subject to legal proceedings...

On the record

The Church were made aware of these allegations in 2023. Save to say that the church deny they are liable and dispute that an offer of that amount was made. As the matter remains the subject of ongoing confidential negotiations, it would be inappropriate for any further comment to be made at this time. In our view, to do so would risk undermining the integrity of the current dispute resolution process.

Re: business

What is the combined turnover of companies associated with the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church?

The Church does not run any businesses and does not employ anyone. Many Brethren and their families own and operate their own businesses, and the Church has no legal, financial or any other interest in their businesses.

Re: the UBT – from PBCC

UBT is an entirely separate entity to the church. We have referred your questions to them, and they will come back to you separately. The ones which are relevant to PBCC, we have answered below.

Does the PBCC require members to purchase IT equipment such as mobile phones and laptops from UBT?

No.

Are all mobile phones and computers purchased by PBCC members installed with Streamline 3 software sold by UBT <https://www.streamline3.com/home> which restricts and monitors members' online searching and access? We note Streamline 3's web page says it has "*Quick and easy protection mode, Safe Search enables user-access to all content except particular inappropriate categories, as specified by the administrator*" and "*a desktop-based web management console allows administrators to analyse and ensure productive usage of networked PCs*".

Church members are not required to purchase technology with Streamline3 installed. The rest of this question is for UBT to answer.

Is it appropriate for a church to monitor internet usage of its members?

The church doesn't.

Re: women

What is your response to the claims by former members that women in the PBCC, once married, are expected only to become "*essentially a babymaker and a housewife*"? Is that appropriate in 2025?

We make two initial points here. Firstly the role of women in our church has evolved today compared to decades ago, just like in other parts of society. Secondly, there are family dynamics here. No doubt there are people amongst our church who have very conservative views on the role of women, just like there would be amongst people from other religions or parts of society. But this is not church doctrine.

What we can do is confirm that women play an incredibly important, central role in church life today. Some run businesses. Some volunteer extensively. Some work after getting married and some do not.

I would like to expand on this answer to the role of women in church services, as we get the question often. Women in our church perform different roles to men. And they sit in different parts of our church. Women in mosques often sit behind partitions. Women in Orthodox synagogues often sit on the other side of the mechitza. Women in our church sit in a different row of the pews. Different doesn't mean second or worse.

In summary, the claim you are making in no way reflects the reality of the experience of being a woman in our church in 2025.

You have previously referred the ABC to a passage written in Ephesians which says that "*wives should submit to their husbands in everything*." Is that an appropriate message for young women in 2025?

It's not our church's message, it's the bible's message. And it should be considered in the full context, as we gave it to your colleagues at the ABC:

“Our beliefs in this area are no different to those of millions of other Christians around the world. There is significant scripture about these and related questions, including at KJV Ephesians Ch 5 v 21 – 33 and Ch 6 v 1 -4

“As a starting point please review references to husbands loving their wives, children obeying their parents, submitting ourselves to one another and wives submitting to their husbands.”

Are women “brainwashed in the cult?”

Whoever told you this is the same person who told you that the women in our church can't have their knees showing. It is a factual inaccuracy perpetuated by the media.

For more information see here:

- <https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/our-members/any-questions/#why-do-people-reference-the-pbcc-as-a-cult?-are-you?>
- <https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/our-members/any-questions/#what-is-the-role-of-women-in-the-church?>

Re: 'rules'

The church generally has traditions and practices rather than hard rules, beyond obviously following the bible.

Do you still prohibit members from

1. **Going to cinemas and/or watching movies**
2. **Listening to radio**

See here - <https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/our-members/any-questions/#do-the-plymouth-brethren-watch-movies-or-television?>

3. **Marrying who they wish**

The church has never done this. See here -

<https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/way-of-life/marriage/>

4. **Having pets**

Some members of our church keep animals. Some do not. And some operate whole farms. As a general rule, what we can say is that members of our church avoid anything which could distract from devotion to Jesus Christ.

5. **Having swimming pools**

Some members of our church have pools, and some don't.

6. **Wearing jeans (women)**

In general Brethren women don't choose to wear pants, however of course do wear appropriate clothing if engaged in practical tasks. Schoolgirls often wear leggings under skirts.

7. Wearing jewellery except wedding rings (women)

There is no strict rule. Women make their own choices and can be found wearing rings, bracelets and necklaces. Women will also wear an engagement and wedding ring, while men generally avoid any jewellery.

8. Living in homosexual relationships/practising openly gay lifestyles

Our members around the world, like millions of other Christians, desire to live our lives according to Scripture and therefore based on Scripture we believe sexual relationships should be between a man and a woman and take place within the sanctity of marriage, but we also acknowledge that others outside of our church can and do have different views.

For more information see here:

<https://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/our-members/any-questions/#what-are-the-church%E2%80%99s-beliefs-regarding-diversity-and-inclusion?>

What do you say to the claim that the environment where families feel that they must shun a son/daughter/brother/sister/mother/father who leaves the PBCC?

You would have to check, but we believe it is groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Amish who practice shunning. Our church does not. Thankfully it's rare that people choose to leave our church, but when that happens we are obviously sad to see them go, but wish them well.

And of an already small proportion of church members who choose to leave, a small number of those speak unfavourably about their experience – and while that is regrettable it is hardly a unique situation for any church to find itself in.

Contrary to some of the myths perpetuated about us, we do not prevent former members from contacting their families. There are many examples of people who have stayed in contact with family who have left the church.

What we cannot do is force families to maintain contact with that relative if they don't want to.

Do you preach or foster the understanding that a PBCC member who leaves is "worse than dead"?

No. In saying this, the church does not know, and can't be held responsible for, everything that every member has ever said about every person who has left the church.

What do you say to the claim that members are too frightened to leave the PBCC because they know the consequences will be too great?

What do we say to this: The claim does not reflect the everyday, happy and fulfilling experience of most people who are part of our church. We live our entire lives as part of a community who love each other, love God and often have a good time. There is a very small number of people who leave, and there is a very small percentage of those who become activists against the church.

That small number of vocal people who aren't fans of the church may claim we are all frightened and sad, but this dystopian picture is just not the reality of our everyday lives.

What do you say to the use of the term “escape” by ex-members to describe them leaving the PBCC?

If they characterise leaving us as escape, then that's for them. It doesn't change the fact that we wish them well and hope they find the peace and joy that they are looking for.

As an aside, not many people leave our church, and of those who do, many end up returning. This would tend to disprove the proposition.

As a final point – just like with any other church, there are no signed contracts! People who want to stay, stay. The few who want to leave, leave.

QUESTIONS TO MR BRUCE HALES

We have not passed your questions on to Mr Hales. However the church does provide the following answers which you can attribute to us.

Your questions about Mr Waskey focus on what Mr Diplock and Mr Strange said, not anything Mr Hales said. Your questions should be directed to parties actually involved.

Secondly you clearly have a copy of the Ministries, so on that basis I draw your attention to the opening statements which specifically state:

It is intended for the benefit of members of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church only. As a result it may contain language and expressions rooted in Scripture, and Scriptural principle, the meaning and intent of which may differ from their common usage. Any reader who has acquired this material who is not a member of the Brethren community should not assume that their interpretation of this Ministry is an accurate reflection of the doctrine of the Church, or the views of the individual speaker.

The church doesn't comment on, or make, personal character assessments except to note that not everyone always gets on with everybody else, but name-calling should always be discouraged.