

# **The truth about the Exclusive Brethren**

## **What this booklet is about**

Over the last few months, and particularly in recent weeks, there has been much media coverage of a number of issues related to the Brethren Church. Almost without exception, the reports and stories have been hostile. In every case they have included material that was off beam – factually incorrect, exaggerated, speculative or just plain unfair. Brethren members have been harassed and material has been published in various forums that has expressed hatred and ridicule for our Church. This booklet is an attempt to offer factual information about who we are, how we live and what we believe.

## **Who are the Exclusive Brethren?**

The Brethren Church commenced 180 years ago through John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) formerly a clergyman of the Church of Ireland. He with others established a fellowship based on strict observance of Christian beliefs and way of life as set out in the Holy Scriptures.

Today there are about 13,000 Brethren members in Australia and 43,000 worldwide. The Church does not actively recruit members. Occasionally, not often, members do leave the fellowship but, contrary to media reports, only a very small number are on bad terms with the Church.

## **The principle of separation**

The Brethren believe that separation is a vital part of our loyalty to Christ and we derive this belief from the scriptures. Separation principally occurs in matters of fellowship and includes social activities such as eating and drinking, membership of societies and entertainment. Our fellowship in such activities is reserved for Brethren. Social activities must be shared with those who participate in Holy Communion according to scriptural teaching.

We believe that the principle of separation helps us in our endeavour to live in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture, however, we freely recognise that we live in a wider community, and as very active participants live, work and lead lives dispersed throughout Australian society.

We do not live in isolation or in secrecy. Our homes are situated amongst the homes of other Australians. We have substantial day-to-day dealings with non-Brethren in our businesses, and over half our employees are non-Brethren. We deal almost exclusively with non-Brethren customers.

All teachers employed at Brethren schools are non-Brethren. Goods and services are purchased from businesses owned and operated by non-Brethren. Our legal, audit and other advisers include non-Brethren.

## **Separation and family breakdown**

Our principle of separation is said by some people to be responsible for family breakdowns. We do not believe this to be a statement of truth.

The divorce and separation rate among Brethren members is less than one-twentieth of the national rate, reflecting our strong emphasis on marriage for life and the maintenance of the family unit. There is always paramount concern for the children of broken marriages, and despite claims that the Church denies lapsed members contact with their children, this is not so. Whilst those responsible seek to ensure that Brethren children grow up according to scriptural teaching, our members are committed to obey court orders and comply with such orders, as the Church expects of them.

## **The Brethren lifestyle**

The Brethren lead a lifestyle that is unfamiliar to the general community, but it is one based on Christian teachings and is fully compliant with Australian laws. We believe that the whole of our life should be a shining witness to the grace and mercy of God.

In conducting our daily lives, we place a lot of emphasis on hard work, minimising debt, not taking risks, caring for families and communities and respecting government. We do not work on a Saturday or a Sunday except in emergencies.

On moral issues, we are conservative in our beliefs. We do not seek to interfere with how other people lead their lives, rather we teach respect for the general community and seek to live at peace with the public.

We are, however, strongly opposed to the teaching of homosexual lifestyles in schools and the concept of gay marriage.

The Brethren lifestyle is one of continuous giving to those in need of help. This includes assisting people in the Brethren fellowship as well as charitable giving. We assist other Church members to establish businesses and provide employment to Brethren members, amongst whom there is virtually no unemployment.

Our lifestyles are quite simple compared to those of average Australians. We do not own radios and television or watch movies nor attend public cinemas and theatre. We do not eat in restaurants unless in emergencies, nor do we gamble, own holiday houses, pleasure craft, or invest on the share market.

Much of the life of Brethren members is taken up in the practice of fellowship with other members including attending bible studies and scripture sermons on a daily basis.

## **Brethren and the law**

Brethren hold, as a principle, the deepest respect for the law, and teach obedience to the law and integrity in personal and business matters. The Church meets Federal, State and Territory law obligations.

Both sides of politics in Australia have for many decades acknowledged that the Brethren hold a genuine conscientious objection against joining

associations and this has been recognised in various State and Federal laws. Other minority religious groups are also covered by these exemptions.

While Brethren members served in the armed forces in the World Wars I and II, and also in Korea and Vietnam, they sought conscientious exemption from bearing arms but undertook many other tasks - such as medical duties – that were assigned to them and this often involved serving in the front line.

## **Political involvement**

The Brethren Church does not participate in politics and members pray for governments regardless of which political party is in office. Our members abstain from voting on conscientious grounds but individual members are free to support causes or principles in which they believe.

We believe, as citizens, that we should be able to warn the public of serious challenges to the moral fabric of society, including through advertisements, and we do not see this as a contradiction with not voting. We also believe it is the democratic right of every person to be able to make representation to government.

Individual Brethren members, on their own initiative, have occasionally placed advertisements in newspapers and produced leaflets because of their concern about proposed policies with which they strongly disagree.

## **Brethren schools**

The Brethren run schools for primary and secondary students in every State of Australia in capital cities and regional centres. In total over 2,000 students attend these schools.

These schools receive government funding under the same formula as all non-government schools. The schools are also vigorously supported by the generosity of Brethren members so that students from lower socio-economic households are subsidised. No funds, either by loan or gift, are provided by

the Brethren Church and school management is completely separate from the Church.

To receive government funding, Brethren schools must meet all Federal and State requirements, including regular inspections and audits in the same way as all other non-government schools. Teachers deliver the curriculum as set out by the Office of the Board of Studies. Educational programs lead onto Year 12 certificates and current student academic performance is at or above State average levels.

Nationally recognised vocational education and training courses are provided to senior students. Many students pursue further education through tertiary study, vocational training, trade courses and other business disciplines.

All teachers, and all Brethren schools, are properly registered and accredited by the appropriate State body and teachers are not members of the Church. Modern teaching aids, including computers and DVDs, are used and students undertake excursions and engage in a range of sporting and physical activities.

We respect and promote education but prefer learning institutions other than university. Even the government precludes access to university for less able students. Brethren endeavor to provide a secure future for young people of all capabilities.

## **Meeting rooms**

There are approved church meeting rooms throughout Australia. They are dedicated to worship and are used for prayer, bible study and gospel sermons. Meeting rooms are generally closed after the starting time of church services for security reasons. The rooms are used frequently because we believe that Christians are in constant need of communion with Christ to enable us to live in accord with the word of God. Keeping near to and having direct links with the Trinity is spoken of in every Brethren meeting.

Well disposed members of the public are welcome to enquire of Brethren regarding attendance at meetings subject to an acceptable Church dress code and an undertaking to respect and not interfere or disrupt the church services.

Meetings are held for the purpose of studying the Holy Scriptures. There are no hierarchies or clerical orders in the Brethren Church. All members are encouraged to participate actively in meetings.

### **Further information**

Visit the website [www.theexclusivebrethren.com](http://www.theexclusivebrethren.com) or contact:

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