

Strict Rules Dictate Way Of Life For Sect Families

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THE foundations of the **Exclusive Brethren** lie with a more famous religious sect, the Plymouth Brethren.

The **Exclusive Brethren** is believed to have grown out of the teachings of Englishman J.N. Darby before going on its own extreme way when the Plymouth Brethren broke into several factions in the late 1940s.

Congregations have since sprung up all over Australia, but recently members have been encouraged to live in country towns.

Members are required to live according to a strict set of rules. Those who do not comply with the rules are excluded from the sect and members are banned from having further contact with them until the situation is resolved.

In some cases, members are excluded totally from the sect and it is almost impossible to re-enter.

According to a former sect member, the rules can be changed at any time by the leader of the time.

Women are not allowed to cut their hair, must not wear trousers and must wear scarves on their heads when in public.

In most cases, they are told to wear a bow in their hair, to represent a token of their submission to men.

Men must have short hair and are not permitted to have facial hair such as beards and moustaches.

Though many members own farms or work on farms, none are permitted to live on them.

The group is wary of technology and televisions, radios, computers and record and compact disc players

are banned. Members are expected to attend nightly meetings and must attend church three times on Sunday - the first service is held at 6am.

The halls where the group meets are usually owned by a group of members because the Brethren itself does not have a corporate identity.

The property on which the buildings are set is considered holy ground and children are not allowed to play games there.

Eating is prohibited in the buildings and there are no mirrors because it is believed that mirrors encourage vanity.

The buildings do not usually have windows. There are no clocks in the rooms because Brethren members believe the length of their meetings should not be governed by time.

Men do not wear watches in the meeting rooms.

The man is considered the head of the household and the wife must not go out to work unless the man is unable to work.

Young people are not permitted to leave home except to get married.

Members are generally not allowed to have relationships with their partners before marriage. They are encouraged to get to know each of life for sect families other in the time immediately following meetings and the woman is not permitted to wear an engagement ring.

Members are not allowed to read novels and comic books are also banned.

Children attend school only in the first seven years because Brethren members believe the schooling system is becoming increasingly evil. Most high school-age children are home-taught.

It is believed Brethren members take offence at their children being taught subjects such as evolution and sex education.

When at school, members are not allowed to eat lunch with other children and are not permitted to visit the homes of fellow students after school.

Members are not permitted to pilot planes because they would have to use a radio to do so.

They are required to keep contact with non-Brethren members to a minimum and are forbidden to hold meaningful conversations with any person other than a Brethren member.

Other rules include:

* No adjoining sewer pipes.

*No shared driveways.

*No turbo-charged cars.

*No red cars.

*No picnics.

*No smoking.

*No university.

*No bright clothes at church.

*No parachuting.

*No school camps.

*No pets.

*No guard dogs.

*No working on fishing boats.

*No fax machines.

*No attending outside entertainment.

*No owning dairy farms.

*No musical instruments.

*No honeymoons.

*No staying at motels.

*No working on Saturdays.

*No owning a boat.

*No china cabinets.

Former Brethren member John Wallis said the rules of the sect changed spasmodically.

"One of the difficulties of being a member is that you never know what the next new rule will be," he said.

"They change at the whim or fancy of the head of the church."

Members were always in danger of breaking rules which they did not know existed.

Mr Wallis said it was impossible to establish an accurate and current list of rules. "As soon as the stupidity of some of the rules are exposed, they change without notice and then it is said that they never existed," he said. This was frustrating for young members but devoted members found it to be a source of intrigue.

"The other thing about it is that rules are used by one member to control other members," he said.

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