

National Story

Exclusive Brethren's 'Elect Vessel' tours NZ

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By [Louisa Cleave](#)

The world leader of the Exclusive Brethren is touring New Zealand on a private jet, meeting members who know him as the Elect Vessel and the Man of God.

Sydney-based Bruce Hales was in Tauranga last night and his tour includes meetings at churches and private homes throughout the North Island, including Whangarei, Lower Hutt and Wanganui.

It is believed the publicity-shy Mr Hales is travelling with a personal bodyguard who has previously guarded Prime Minister Helen Clark as a member of the police diplomatic protection squad.

The Weekend Herald understands Mr Hales' protector is former policeman Charlie Tyler, now based in Sydney. A spokesman for the diplomatic protection squad said Mr Tyler resigned from the police about two years ago.

Exclusive Brethren spokesman Tony McCorkell last night confirmed Mr Hales was in New Zealand to meet church members and conduct Bible meetings, "not to lobby Helen Clark or the National Party or anything like that".

"There's certainly no major political activity or anything like that planned, nothing at all."

He would not confirm Mr Hales' travel plans "for security reasons", and was not aware of the Elect Vessel's security arrangements as they related to Mr Tyler.

Mr Hales would be in Tauranga until about Sunday.

The church has been particularly wary of publicity since being exposed for circulating pamphlets before the 2005 general election. It later emerged then-National leader Don Brash knew of the campaign and had met church members.

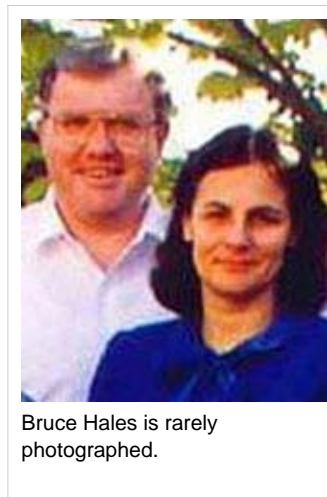
The flyers attacked Labour and the Greens and the Brethren were accused of hiring private detectives to shadow ministers in an initially covert campaign the Government said cost about \$1 million.

Members do not vote but have been involved in political lobbying and making campaign donations in Australia and the United States.

A spokesman for National Party leader John Key said he had made it clear the party wanted nothing to do with the Brethren.

The Brethren's \$2.6 million gated complex at Mangere in Manukau City was empty yesterday.

The church in New Zealand has about 10,000 followers and 800 Brethren businesses in 40 centres.



Bruce Hales is rarely photographed.