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## Tight security as Brethren leader meets faithful

By ROBYN BRISTOW in RANGIORA - The Press | Wednesday, 21 March 2007

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Five burly security men yesterday guarded the Exclusive Brethren's headquarters as hundreds of followers poured into North Canterbury to meet their world leader, Bruce Hales.

Amid tight security, Hales met the faithful at the sect's Newnham Street headquarters in Rangiora.

At least 10 buses were parked inside the property, alongside many cars. Cars also lined the footpath outside the wrought-iron gates where the security guards, from a private firm, patrolled and kept the media at bay as followers from around the South Island gathered.

Sect members declined to speak to The Press as they left on foot to homes nearby for a break at noon.

Hales is on a whistle-stop tour of New Zealand, meeting members who know him as the Elect Vessel and the Man of God.

The Sydney businessman spent two days in the North Canterbury town before being whisked away in a car late yesterday morning for a flight to Auckland. He has also visited Whangarei, Tauranga, Lower Hutt and Dunedin using a private plane to jet around the country and meet church members and conduct Bible meetings.

Rangiora has long had links with the exclusive sect, and is home to many large extended Brethren families including the Hickmotts, the Larsens, the Dartnalls and the Hows.

Their business interests range from large buildings and engineering concerns to truck accessories, farming and furniture. They own many of the businesses in the industrial site of Newnham Street, backing on to the sect's Rangiora headquarters.

The headquarters is protected by high wooden fences and towering security lights.

Ron Hickmott, a Rangiora businessman who owns a venetian blind manufacturing business in Rangiora, was one of the key players in a \$1 million anti-Labour and Greens campaign Brethren members ran before the last election.

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Don Scott

GUARDED ENTRY: Exclusive Brethren followers are under close watch as they visit the sect's Newnham Street, Rangiora, headquarters yesterday to meet their world leader.

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