

Valley Views, *Diamond Valley Leader*, 4 May 2005

Concern, not fear

RE: the article "Brethren plan meets discontent" (*DV Leader*, April 20) about the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren's proposed church in Zig Zag Road North, Eltham.

Some might interpret the article as suggesting that objectors to the proposal are somehow fearful and ignorant. I have spoken with many of the objectors and I can assert we are neither.

There is certainly substantial opposition to the proposed church, but our objections reflect a concern to retain the residential character of our neighbourhood and, we believe, rely on good, hard planning criteria.

Mayor Greg Johnson is quoted as saying that one church member had been verbally abused at a consultation meeting on February 28.

I was there and do not remember any verbal abuse taking place.

However, I did hear one objector tell the meeting he had received an anonymous note threatening to do him in for having an allegedly illegal structure if he opposed the Brethren's planning application.

Church member Mr (Adrian) Mead was reported as saying the Federal Government regarded the Brethren as being "one of Australia's major faiths". I dispute this. Together with almost 400 other religions, the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren is identified as a distinct faith for census purposes.

According to the 2001 Census, the Brethren's numbers within the total for a group of 135 religions, represented only 2.7 per cent of all Australians. By contrast, 21 per cent of Australians professed to be Anglicans. So, recognised, yes, but major faith definitely no.

I believe this to be a half truth that was reflected in the church's planning application.

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