

National Victoria

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'My father saved my life': Tributes flow for child sex abuse victims' advocate Anthony Foster

By **Melissa Cunningham****Updated** June 7, 2017 – 7.03pm, first published at 5.00pm

EDITOR'S NOTE: The High Court overturned Cardinal George Pell's conviction for historic child sex offences in a judgment handed down April 7, 2020. In a unanimous decision all seven High Court judges found Victoria's Court of Appeal should not have upheld Pell's conviction. It found the evidence could not support a guilty verdict.

It was the formidable force of a father's love that spurred Anthony Foster to become a high-profile advocate for child sex abuse victims.



The Foster family: Chrissie, Katie, Aimee, Emma and Anthony.

Mr Foster and his wife Chrissie dedicated two decades to seeking justice for sexual abuse victims within the Catholic Church.

Hundreds of people packed into the Melbourne Recital Centre to farewell Mr Foster at a state funeral on Wednesday.



Anthony Foster was farewelled at the Melbourne Recital Centre by wife Chrissie, daughter Aimee and son-in-law Luke Salkowski. JUSTIN MCMANUS

The 64-year-old hit his head in a fall last month. His family switched off his life support on May 26.

The Fosters became advocates and role models for other families grappling with the turmoil of child sexual abuse and trauma from an inadequate response by the Catholic Church.

Two of the Fosters' daughters, Emma and Katie, were repeatedly raped by disgraced Melbourne priest Kevin O'Donnell while pupils at a primary school in Melbourne's Oakleigh parish.

After years of turmoil and a decade-long court battle, Emma took her own life at the age of 26.



Thousands paid tribute to child sex abuse campaigner Anthony Foster on Wednesday. JUSTIN MCMANUS

Her sister Katie drank heavily before being left severely disabled when hit by a drunk driver in 1999. She now requires 24-hour care.

Mr Foster challenged Cardinal George Pell on many occasions, travelling to Rome in February 2016 to hear Pell give evidence before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.



Premier Daniel Andrews pays his respect to Chrissie Foster after the service. JUSTIN MCMANUS

The funeral heard Chrissie was Mr Foster's soul mate and he never stopped telling her how much she meant to him.

Daughter Aimee paid tribute to her dad, saying Mr Foster showed extraordinary courage and grace.

"My father saved my life and I'm sure countless others too," Aimee said.

"When he saw those tortured souls we all recognise on the edge of society, in various states of self destruction, I don't doubt he saw his precious babies."

The chairman of the royal commission, Justice Peter McClellan, said Mr Foster had campaigned tirelessly for a national inquiry because he knew that without it, the Australian community could not comprehend the gravity of the national tragedy.

"Anthony was a loving and good man. He was gentle, courageous and caring," he said.

"Anthony's legacy will be realised by a just response for all those who were abused in an institution. This must include a commitment by the Australian community that these terrible crimes should never happen again."

Close friend and ABC journalist Paul Kennedy, who wrote *Hell on the Way to Heaven* with Mrs Foster about the family's harrowing story, called on both state and federal politicians to continue his work.

He also shared with the thousands of mourners his lasting image of the man he called his "hero".

Mr Foster had been standing outside his Gippsland property next to a Japanese maple tree with bright red leaves.

It was the day after the birth of his second grandchild, Ivy. His grandson was sitting on his shoulders and his heart was bursting with love.

As sunlight fell on their faces, they both threw their heads back and laughed.

"May that little boy and his sister one day grow up to read about their wonderful grandfather and all he did for their generation and the generations before them, and for many more generations of Australian children to come," Mr Kennedy said.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews said Mr Foster was grace personified.

"Grace is generous, grace is kind. And grace recognises no class, caste," he said.

"Because of Anthony, victims are now finally being heard and because of Anthony, this nation and this state are fundamentally changed forever," he said.



The Foster family in January 1988. From left: Emma, 6, Aimee, 2, Chrissie, Katie, 4, and Anthony.

