



EXTRACT FROM
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HANSARD



*Mr McGUIRE
Broadmeadows*

*Anthony Foster
Condolance Motion*

Tuesday, 6 June 2017

CONDOLANCE MOTION

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Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (*By leave*) — Anthony Foster told truth to power concerning a cover-up that killed. When Chrissie Foster informed me of her husband's death at 7.36 a.m. on 27 May I was preparing to take my son to Saturday sport, that ritual marking the weekend's respite for so many families.

I am very sorry to tell you that Anthony passed away yesterday after collapsing suddenly on Wednesday. Our hearts are breaking at losing him but he will always be in our hearts and minds.

My response was immediate:

Dear Chrissie,

You and Anthony are the most courageous people I have met.

You found the words for those who struggled, or could not speak.

You gave hope to people who clung to the truth but had no power.

Your perseverance means there can be no more wilful blindness.

Your leadership has delivered cultural, generational and systemic change.

Your fortitude in bearing witness saved lives.

Your strength epitomised parenthood in standing up for your children and protecting so many more.

The news is gut-wrenching, the loss is profound but the legacy will never be forgotten.

Chrissie Foster responded:

We only ever struggled to do the right thing and try to right the wrong.

When the family testified to this Parliament in November 2012, Anthony declared:

Our appearance before you today is, in a very personal sense, absolutely futile. We wish we did not have to be here, but we refuse to let the Catholic Church take any more children from us. Whatever we or you do will not restore Emma's life or heal Katie's injuries. But you can make a difference to the lives of thousands of other victims now and prevent the abuse of further children.

Anthony and Chrissie Foster presented two photographs to the inquiry. The first was a portrait of a beaming family. Emma and Katie were attending the Sacred Heart school in Oakleigh at the time. Unbeknown to their parents the parish priest, Father Kevin O'Donnell, was raping the sisters. Emma was only five years old when the horror began. Despite victims repeatedly reporting O'Donnell's offences to the Catholic Church hierarchy, he was moved to new parishes and innocent children with fatal consequences. The other photograph depicted Emma a decade later, wrists and arms bloodied from a suicide attempt.

Anthony Foster declared that if only the church had acted on the complaints, Emma would still be alive and Katie would not be permanently crippled. Younger sister Aimee testified how distressed she felt seeing the lives of her sisters unravel:

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I cannot describe to you the weight of the pain I have felt.

That burden was felt when Anthony Foster requested a minute's silence to honour his deceased daughter and the family joined hands at the hearing. Time ached. Silence offered no solace. Only the bell from a tram lurching into Bourke Street earthed emotions to a familiar comfort.

On Christmas Day 2013 Anthony Foster shared a moment of family bliss. He and Chrissie had become grandparents to a beautiful girl. Aimee had given birth to Ivy. The following year Anthony sent me a picture of Aimee and grandson Leo, born on Australia Day. This is the photograph I keep.

Six months ago this chamber erupted in spontaneous applause at Anthony and Chrissie Foster's courage and pursuit of the truth as they witnessed the latest legislation in a raft of bipartisan reforms protecting our children. The Wrongs Amendment (Organisational Child Abuse) Bill 2016 aims to prevent a repeat of the fate the Fosters and so many other families suffered through cultures of concealment or noble cause corruption, a misplaced sense of loyalty to a higher duty. The evil that men do lives after them, but the love of Anthony and Chrissie Foster has left a life-saving legacy that usurped that miser fate.

For all that entailed, for all Anthony, Chrissie and their family and so many others endured and overcame, we are humbled and grateful.