

Pain of abuse killed Emma

Spectre of evil priest haunted her to the end

A FAMILY'S brave battle to save a child sexually abused by a priest ended tragically last week with the death of the Melbourne woman.

Emma Foster, 26, died alone on her bedroom floor clutching her teddy bear, a treasured first birthday present from her parents.

It was a tragic end to a life shattered by abuse by the family's parish priest.

For 13 years, Emma's parents, Anthony and Christine, battled to keep their eldest daughter alive as she rode a roller-coaster of drugs and self-destructive behaviour.

Last Sunday, they were told Emma had died of a suspected drug overdose.

"Over the past days we

'Over the past few days we have experienced grief like we could never possibly imagine or have predicted'

**ANTHONY FOSTER,
EMMA'S FATHER**

have experienced grief like we could never possibly have imagined or predicted," Mr Foster said.

Emma and younger sister Katie were victims of Father Kevin O'Donnell as students at Sacred Heart Primary School, Oakleigh, from 1988 to 1993.

O'Donnell served 15 months' jail after pleading guilty to indecently assaulting 11 boys and one girl, aged eight to 14, between 1946 and 1977. He died after his release in 1997.

Katie, 22, turned to alcohol to dull memories of her abuse and was hit by a drunk

KIM WILSON

driver in 1999, leaving her with intellectual and physical disabilities.

O'Donnell was not charged with offences against Emma and Katie but the Catholic Church paid the family a confidential six-figure settlement.

"He could walk in there any time, any class, any day and take whatever child he liked... to a secluded spot," Mrs Foster said.

"I felt so stupid that I thought these men were next to God and he's been having sex with kids for 50 years."

Emma's parents found out when she was 12.

"It seemed when she read about his offences in the local paper of March, 1995 it hit her that that is what happened to her and she became anorexic and went into an adolescent psych unit in September of that year," Mrs Foster said.

Mr Foster said his daughter was a caring and vibrant person.

"It was just overshadowed by what happened to her and it was too heavy for her to bear," he said.

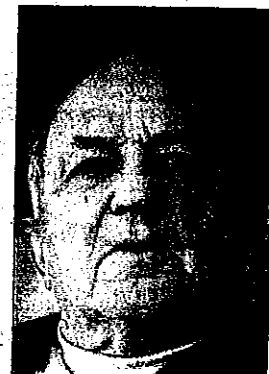
Emma tried heroin at 17 and went on to use several illicit and prescription drugs.

"It made her forget things, took the pain away," Mr Foster said.

Mr Foster said the family was "going to suffer a lot of pain, but we're not going to let him take away our life or our good memories of Emma".

Emma's funeral will be on Tuesday at Boyd Chapel, Springvale Botanical Cemetery, at 10.30am. Instead of flowers, the family has asked for donations to Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse.

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Tragedy: Emma Foster, 26, died of a suspected drug overdose after being sexually abused by Catholic priest Father Kevin O'Donnell. In the photo above, Anthony and Christine Foster are with their daughters Emma and Katie.

Inquiry looms as more suicides linked to sexual abuse by Catholic priests



Eileen Piper with a picture of daughter Stephanie, who killed herself in 1994, and (inset) Stephanie meets the Pope in the early '90s. PICTURE: MICHAEL CLAYTON-JONES

BY NICK MCKENZIE, RICHARD BAKER AND JOSH GORDON

ite abuse says MP

icide victims



From *The Age* last Friday

fronting, adversarial, legalistic and intimidating for victims.

While the Bushfires Royal Commission had to provide a forensic examination of failings, in this case individual crimes would be a matter for police and the courts, he said. "This committee needs to concentrate on the broader and system implications and come up with policy recommendations."

Asked whether the committee was capable of such an inquiry, he said it could seek help, including a legal adviser and support staff. "The members are a bipartisan cross-section of the Parliament and we have every confidence in them."

Survivors and churches welcomed the inquiry, even acknowledging its lack of independence, saying it would expose the horrors of abuse.

Nicky Davis, president of Survivors' Network of those Abused by Priests, congratulated the government for being the first in Australia "to take the plight of victims of Catholic Church-enabled child rape seriously ... This is a huge step forward in topping the reign of terror of sexual predators enjoying the prestige and protection of this powerful institution."

Mother can't forge the day she lost her beautiful boy

HINDSIGHT and maternal intuition mean Helen Watson can pinpoint precisely the moment when life for her 15-year-old son began to unravel. There's no consolation in the memory.

She can summon up the scene, see it, smell it — the "absolutely reeking" stench of alcohol wafting from the young priest, and the strange discomfort in her boy's demeanour when he arrived back at the family farmhouse that morning.

What she can't do is fix it, though she has devoted many years since to retrieving what ever justice, amends or lessons she might find in the moment.

Her son, Peter, had spent the night in Ararat at the parish presbytery. He and some mates had been invited there by a visiting priest to watch a movie. It was a blue movie, she would later learn, with booze laid on.

Despite ner shock at the priest's rough condition, Ms Watson invited him to stay for breakfast — she was a country-bred Catholic girl, and it would be unimaginable for her not to extend every courtesy to visiting clergy.

Much to her relief, Father Paul David Ryan told her he had to get back to Ararat to say Mass. Meanwhile her son had quietly vanished into his bedroom, closing the door behind him.

In a sense, that was the last she saw of him. "Peter was just never the same after that day," says Ms Watson. "It was just horrific. He was just a beautiful young boy who was pretty good at most things he touched. And he just changed."



JO CHANDLER

upbringing. Evenings at home would almost always include kneeling before a statue of Our Lady, offering up a rosary or a Her formative years revolved around faith, doctrine and Sunday Mass. Her memory is demanding ritual and the odd harsh nun, but nothing more malignant.

Despite marrying a non-Catholic, she still cherished her faith and took her two sons to Mass every week, a 20-minute drive to the nearest church from their acreage in sheep and grain country at Latyoon, south of Ararat.

She also made sure Peter, born in 1975, and his younger brother ticked off all the requisite sacraments, and enrolled them at the regional Catholic college.

Peter had been identified early as a bright student. He loved life on the land — "it was great upbringing", Ms Watson recalls. "The boys were always out in the paddock with their dad, or playing football or cricket."

But after the sleepover at the presbytery, Peter developed behavioural problems. As he and their first-born, Ms Watson and her husband Tim (they later split) hoped that maybe he was just negotiating a particularly bumpy part of the adolescent journey.



Peter Watson, who took his own life in 1999.

Church's suicide v

■ Police link at least 40 deaths to clergy

■ Pressure grows on Baillieu to launch inquiry

EXCLUSIVE

By NICK MCKENZIE
RICHARD BAKER
and JANE LEE

CONFIDENTIAL police reports have detailed the suicides of at least 40 people sexually abused by Catholic clergy in Victoria, and have urged a new inquiry into these and many other deaths suspected to be linked to abuse in the church.

In a damning assessment of the church's handling of abuse issues, the reports say it appears the church has known about a shockingly high rate of suicides and premature deaths but has chosen to remain silent.

Written by Detective Sergeant Kevin Carson, the reports state that while conducting lengthy inquiries into paedophile clergy, investigators have discovered an inordinate number of suicides which appear to be a consequence of sexual offending.

"The number of people contacting this office to report members of their family reveals that

in the years following sexual assault by Catholic fraternity".

The report links at least 40 suicides to the sexual abuse perpetrated by a small number of paedophile clergy, including Gerard Ridsdale, Bryan Coffey, Paul Ryan, Robert Best and Edward Dowlan.

One of the reports includes a list of victims' names, dates of births, manner of death and the locations where the abuse is suspected or known to have taken place, including St Leo's primary school in Box Hill, St Joseph's in Geelong and St Alipius in Ballarat East.

Among those named as suicide victims are brothers Damien and Noel Walsh, and their cousin Martin Walsh. Another brother, Rob Walsh, who was also sexually abused by Best and Ridsdale and testified against them in court, told *The Age* last night that an inquiry was needed because of "the church's disregard for the law and disregard for victims".

Most of the victims, who include a student who was dux of his school, were abused between

