

Hi everyone, my name is Mary Anne Carr-Neil and I belong to the Henderson Marian Mothers group. I have been asked by Bev to share my story and to explain **what the Marian Mothers means to me** and why.

It is very appropriate that I am speaking to you in the month of November; it's a time when the church puts an efficacy on remembering the dead.

Our Marian Mothers group is a great support network both emotionally and spiritually. We are always there for each other no matter what the circumstances.

This could not be truer for me over the past few years. The Marian Mothers supported me when I lost my husband 2 years ago. But the story goes back even further than that.

My husband William had a long illness and towards the end I couldn't leave him to attend the Marian Mothers meetings. So the group decided that every second month the meeting would be held at my home and they would supply the supper. There was one meeting I remember when William was sitting next to me - he was not a catholic, but always supported me in anything to do with the church. He sat quietly while we prayed the rosary and started the meeting. After a while, he told me he was ready to go to bed. So I helped him get up and everyone wished him a good night sleep. I excused myself from the meeting and attended to my husband, putting him to bed. When I returned to the meeting I asked where we were up to. The Marian Mothers had stopped the meeting and waited patiently for my return. It made me feel such a valued member of the group.

The days leading up to William's death, all of the Marian Mothers were praying for him, our two daughters and me. William passed away late Thursday night. So I didn't let people know until Friday morning. I only told a couple of members by text and it wasn't long before I was receiving lovely messages of love and support from everyone. A couple of members went to church that morning and asked to have the Mass offered up for William. I went to Mass on the Sunday and sat between two Marian Mothers members where I felt secure. When I came out of Mass I was surrounded by members and fellow parishioners who gave me lots of hugs and kind words of support. At that moment I felt loved and supported and a valued member of my parish. A few of them suggested we go for a coffee, which was a nice way to leave church.

The night before the funeral all of the Marian Mothers came round to our home to pray the rosary, as we had bought William home for the last time. The Marian Mothers had all brought some baking to cater for any visitors that may be popping in over the next few days.

The following day they **all** attended the funeral.

One year on and it was time for William's unveiling and true to form, many of the Marian Mothers attended, even though it was pouring with rain. One member had some Holy Water from Lourdes so we could bless the Headstone.

Everyone was invited back to the house afterwards for afternoon tea. All of the Marian Mothers bought a plate without being asked, because that's just what they do. As soon as they arrived, they were in the kitchen making the cups of tea and doing whatever they could to assist.

I am so thankful for their love, support and kindness. I always thought through this whole experience, it was a one way situation, where I was taking from the Marian Mothers. But as one member reminded me, they also received something from it too. This is what she had to say...

Mary-Anne thanked us recently for our support during the long illness and subsequent death of her husband.

I, in turn, thanked her for being so open, and for sharing her experiences with us. In doing so, she let us into her life and gave us a real insight into what it is to live your faith, and live your marriage vows. We have been able to experience her journey and I know I don't speak only for myself, when I say I have learnt so much from her compassion, her really living her marriage promises in the tough times; she was not afraid to ask for help when she needed it, sought the best care for William, stood up for him when he needed an advocate, and loved him unconditionally throughout. She is a true inspiration – when I grow up I want to be just like her!! (Writer is 45)

Thank you for letting me share my experience with you. After listening to me I'm sure you would have to agree that I have been truly blessed to be part of a wonderful group by whom I have been supported emotionally, as well as spiritually.

It's not just about attending meetings once a month, but about being there for one another, when needed, no matter what the circumstances.