

Sister Helene Higgins

By Judy Wasserman

For the past seven years, Sister Helene Higgins' ministry has been providing parish and community outreach services for New Hampshire Catholic Charities.

She sees it as a way "to help people (get) around the corner." "Hopefully," she said during a recent interview, "we are helping them move their lives forward." Sister does that by being the 'connector.'

For example, she was recently helping a family resolve an electric bill issue, and learned their nine-year-old child was sleeping on a broken futon. At the same time, a family called to donate two day beds. Needless to say, Sister Helene connected the two, and now, the child is sleeping much more comfortably. Sister Helene said, "I am grateful when I am able to help, and to connect people with services." With a chuckle, she told an anecdote about herself. Another agency had run out of ideas to help someone, and told that person, "When you don't know what to do, call Sister Helene." "When you call," they said, "she will listen, and if she doesn't have an immediate answer, she will call back in 24 to 48 hours with a solution." And, sure enough, in this particular case, Sister Helene called back a day later with an idea. She believes, "You just have to take the time to think it through."

Unfortunately though, there are also frustrations with the ministry. For example, there are those who keep seeking help over a period of years from Catholic Charities. Sister Helene finds herself telling them, "We know your need, but we can't respond right now." Besides the frustrations, Sister Helene said, she sees a lot of sadness in her work. "We pour out our lives for others, and so we need to replenish ourselves," she said.

Sister Helene, who entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston in 1965, "feeds her soul" by walking two to four miles every day. She also has treated herself to tickets to the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Doing things like this "make you see there's another world out there." In fact, her world has not been just Catholic Charities.

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Pictured R: Sister Helene during a recent board meeting.

Over the years, her ministries have included being a high school teacher, college professor, and campus minister. Sister, who is not ready to retire, also said there are many touching moments in her work. "God watches over us and helps us connect."

Looking to the future, Sister Helene said she knows she must feed her soul "to continue what I am doing." She also hopes to start more projects and get more people involved in them, so she can start to step away. It's pretty certain one of the lessons she will teach others is that "our greatest gift is connecting." †