

One of the participants in the Lisbon Falls workshop has embraced that call. Helen Kinkaid, a member of All Saints Parish in Brunswick, is a resident services coordinator for three senior housing communities in Freeport. She meets with residents and tries to ensure they have the resources they need.

"I try to keep them independent and self-sufficient," she said. "What I do is not a job. It's a way of life for me."

Kinkaid said she attended the workshop to both contribute and to learn.

"I'm always studying and researching it and writing," she said. "It's a passion I have for the aged."

Harden said there are many ways people can help those who are aging. Sometimes, it's a matter of just being

attentive. He recalls, for instance, a neighbor asking him if he would shovel out her front door, which led him to reflect on the many times he had driven by without ever thinking to do so.

"There is a lot of power in doing what you can," he said.

He also stressed the importance of making sure parishes allow people to age in place, pointing out that, for many, this is the most important community in their lives.

"As people get older, how do you keep them engaged, present? How do you facilitate them fully participating in parish life? And if people are homebound, how do you support them? It's really everything from volunteer drivers to help people get to church to keeping track of people who are no longer coming and finding out if they want to come," he said.

Using *The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully*, a book by Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, as a guide, the participants also reflected on the blessings of aging, including the wisdom that comes with experience and the freedom to finally do things you've always wanted to do.

Five workshops have been held so far, with four more planned. They will be held May 4 at St. Joseph Church in Ellsworth, May 5 at Holy Rosary Church in Caribou, May 18 at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Windham, and June 1 at Immaculate Conception Church in Calais. All run from 9 a.m. to noon. FMI: 207.781.8550 or psm@ccmaine.org. ■

How the Catholic Appeal Helps

The Aging Friendly workshops are one of several programs sponsored by Catholic Charities Parish Social Ministry (PSM), which receives most of its funding from the annual Catholic Appeal. PSM is also coordinating a prison ministry conference that will be held in Scarborough in June, and it has two e-Waste days planned, one at St. Catherine of Sienna Church in Norway on May 4 and another at St. Thomas School in Sanford on June 8. Both are 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

In addition, PSM works with parishes to support their outreach to those in need, and it provides Matthew 25 grants to parishes, such as the one used to launch the special needs ministry at the Parish of the Holy Eucharist. PSM also responds to calls for emergency assistance.

Exploring the joys and challenges of aging

While there are obstacles that come with aging, there are also opportunities. Helping people prepare for the former and take advantage of the latter are the goals of a series of Aging Friendly workshops being held at parishes around the diocese.

"What are some steps you can be taking now to age well? How is your home set up? How is your financial situation?" Don Harden, Catholic Charities' director of aging services, asked those gathered at a workshop at Holy Trinity Church in Lisbon Falls.

Presented by Catholic Charities Parish Social Ministry, the free workshops are aimed not only at those who are seniors but all those who care for them, care about

them, and are looking ahead to their own golden years. The presentations explored questions such as: How can we live healthy, secure lives as we age? What are the blessings of aging? How do we become an age-responsive parish?

"There are so many messages that aging is bad, but in reality, there are a lot of blessings from aging, so understanding that and also what can we do at a parish level to support people so they can age in place within the parish," explained Harden.

The presentations include some sobering statistics about the challenges faced in Maine, which has the oldest population by median age in the country. Harden said that by the year 2025, it's estimated that 26 percent of Maine's population will be over the age of 65. He said that will put a strain on resources, noting that while 302,000 people are expected to enter the workforce by that time, 411,000 will leave it.

"With the low birth rate and this aging population, we have an incredibly small proportion of people who are going to be available to be in the workforce and take care of aging parents. By 2026, there are going to be two working age adults for every person age 65. It used to be 4 to 1," Harden said.

While the challenges are there, Harden said it only emphasizes the need to be proactive.

"One of the reasons these workshops are so valuable is because everybody has to do what they can. There is so much need. There are so many people getting older that there is no way that tax dollars are going to pay for it, so we all have to figure out what we can do and do it," he said.



Annual Catholic Appeal



Don Harden