

**Day Four - Tuesday, 6/24 – Holy Family, West Hartford to Chris Murphy’s Office, Hartford to St. Joseph’s, Bristol**

We again started our morning going to mass with Fr. John. It was John the Baptist’s feast day. Kind of appropriate.

After mass we again had a wonderful breakfast and our support folks made lunches just like the previous day.

We began to gather for an 8:30 to 8:45 departure time as we had to be at Chris Murphy’s office for 10:00 am. We would be meeting with Kenny Curran, Chris Murphy’s chief of staff.

This was Pam’s Cue Sheet day and she couldn’t wait until it was over. She was nervous about something going wrong.

The ride over to One Constitution Plaza was quite mild although we hit some construction on Farmington Avenue. No problems, no real incidents although Tom Sacerdote and I somehow got too far ahead of the rest and they went off the Cue Sheet in downtown Hartford. Luckily we saw them up ahead and were able to hook up quite easily.

When we got to Chris Murphy’s office, pretty close to 10:00 am I might add, the security guard practically pounced on us because we leaned our bikes against the marble wall outside the office entrance. We had to “pile” the bikes over in a corner carefully leaning them on each other.

A good number of us signed in and went upstairs. We again were going to follow our template and our 5 “Asks”. Kent greeted us warmly, ran and got his notepad and took notes as we presented our 5 issues. He interacted quite readily with us.

He told us Chris Murphy had begun what they called “Senator on the Bus” campaign where he would ride the bus in six different cities to meet and interact with people. Kenney told us this was working very well. Also we were told Chris was trying to engage with the homeless to learn firsthand what they go through on a regular basis. We were told about one incident where Chris Murphy was riding the bus and when a an individual got off the bus the driver told Chris that the gentleman was a homeless vet and that he lived in a tent down the road. Chris Murphy asked the bus driver to stop the bus and he got off to seek out this individual. He found the tent but not the man. He just wanted to reach out to this individual and wanted to help him out.

As we talked, Claire mentioned to Kenny that Chris Murphy should challenge other Senators to do as he is doing. Challenge them to “walk the walk”. Kenny thought that was a good idea and said he would discuss with his boss. Hope this moves forward. We will have to follow up and see. Claire and I passed out business cards over to Kenny.

So we had a productive discussion with Kenny and he welcomed us to come again as he knew we would be back.

We all hopped on or bikes and headed over to Bushnell Park for lunch. We all gathered devoured the Holy Family lunch sandwiches, had watermelon and potato chips, and cherries and leftover cookies and cupcakes. A cherry pit spitting contest then ensued. Don’t know who won but Kathy was pretty good at it.

We left Bushnell Park and headed back up Farmington Avenue through downtown West Hartford and onto route 4 in Farmington and that dangerous intersection where we would pick up route 10. Scary and so busy with traffic. I remember coming down the hill into Farmington when another cyclist came out of nowhere uphill on our side of the road. Head-on collision here we come. Luckily he got off his bike as he realized he was in the wrong and let us all come down safely. Eventually we would pick up route 6 which is always adventurous. We had a few interesting miles on that road but everyone stayed relatively close and safe.

I did have to dodge a car coming out of a shopping center driven by a little old lady as I was coming down hill. A truck first pulled out in plenty of time for me but apparently she thought she could “beat” and make it out before I got to her. No way!! I started screaming and she noticed and quickly put her car in reverse and I made it through fine.

As we got closer to Bristol, Pam warned us of some upcoming hills and also the dangerous railroad tracks going from the St. Vincent de Paul Mission, where we were first headed, to St. Joseph’s. We all knew we would avoid that at all costs.

So we tackled the hills, they got to us some but most of us made it up them without a problem.

Jonnie F and I had gotten ahead of the group and we turned prematurely thinking we were on Route 69 and went up a hill incorrectly. Fun! Luckily Joan called me on the walkie-talkie and told up to turn around and come back down the hill. We saw the group ahead of us at the light at the bottom of the hill.

Once we made the right turn and passed St. Stanislaus parish, we knew we headed in the right direction. Maybe we should come to that parish one day.

So we got to the St. Vincent de Paul Mission which was a shelter and did not have any connection with the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen in Middletown.

We were greeted by a Catholic Transcript reporter and also a Reporter from the local Bristol press. They took plenty of photos and I was interview by the Catholic Transcript guy. I gave him a quick synopsis of our trip thus far with the hills, our good attendance at our presentations, the state reps showing up, and a homeless man speaking to our audience. He seemed impressed. We’ll see what they write up.

We then assembled and we led inside by Linda Kerr who was subbing for Phil Lysiak, the director who was on vacation. Linda did a good job of educating us on the shelter. Their motto “Helping Others Help Themselves”.

They have a homeless shelter with 25 beds for men, women and children. The thing here is they are the only shelter in Bristol and only 25 beds for all the homeless in the entire city of Bristol!

The Shelter is open 24 hours per day, 52 weeks per year. They really only provide temporary emergency shelter to people experiencing homelessness. They are limited to staying only 90 days. Not much can be done in 90 days to get yourself back on your feet. Linda, and Wayne who manages the place shared with us that they felt like they should do more but are limited with what they can do.

Fr. Joe DiSciacca was there and shared with us that the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal funds them with $85,000 to help run the place. Hopefully that will continue or they will be in trouble.

Part of the mission also provides a Women and Children Transitional Center. It is a ten family (women and children only) facility for homeless women and their children. It is a safe environment where women and their children may live for up to two years with hopes of building a healthy home for her and her children. Still tough.

The Mission also has a Transitional Living Center for single, homeless men. It is a 13 bedroom facility. The goal of this facility is to have the residents develop the resources and skills necessary to live independently on a permanent basis. Also quite hard to do.

We were given a tour of the Shelter by Wayne and when were entered the women’s section we were all taken aback by the coldness, and unwelcoming feeling of the way the beds were laded out and the impersonal, lack of privacy situation that these people live in.

We also noticed all the rules, mostly don’ts and restrictions, etc.

We had not seen anything like this before and I think it was getting to us.

We were told that the homeless only frequent the library or McDonald’s during the day as they have nowhere else to go. And McDonald’s only lets them stay for 20 minutes or so and they have to buy something.

You could see it in all of us. We were deflated by this. After all the visits we have made to shelters previously, this one got to us.

We all left feeling a bit down, frustrated, angry.

Some of us didn’t do anymore cycling but we followed the route Fr. Joe had provided for us that avoided the railroad track problem and the steep hill to get to the parish. We still had to go uphill but they were manageable.

We stored the bikes, showered one by one and began to prepare for the potluck and presentation to follow.

The potluck was wonderful. Someone even brought a lobster to share. When has that ever happened at a potluck? The food was great although I did not get to eat much of my meal.

I sat myself down at a table where women were saving seats for each other and their friends. I said you can’t do that because we have to mingle with you. They seemed to reluctantly make space for me. I began talking as I do about what we do and they all seemed very interested and asked a lot of questions. We were interrupted by Bob and he introduced a young woman reporter from the Bristol press who immediately started to interview me.

Even when I thought I had given her all I thought she needed to hear she kept asking me question after question. She was really into it. I never finished by supper before we had to break and do the presentation.

Our presentation was again well attended, about 30 or so with two state representatives.

The presentation went off beautifully and the two reps spoke at the end. We were asked a few questions and ended on a high note.

I was approached by a woman named Nancy Pahl who told me she was homeless and living poverty everyday. She was so honest and sincere and offered to speak with us at any future presentation. I had told her about Aldene and she was excited about sharing her story for us. I asked her to email me after I gave her my card. I figured if she did email me I would know for sure she was serious about working with us in the future.

Sure enough I received her email the day after. I will keep her in the back of my mind for the future. I gave her a big hug as we left for the evening.

Back at the rectory we prepared for bed. I on my blowup mattress and Joan on the couch with her cracked ribs. Everyone else was spread around the living room. We shut off the air conditioning and let the cool night’s breeze in.

Just before bed with debriefed again and everyone shared their word of the day. So glad we kept this going. Seemed to always sum up the day’s events. This debrief was one of the most emotional for all. We asked Fr. Joe if he would like to sit in on it which he gladly did and felt honored to be included. The words that night were Angry; Hopeless; Sad; Frustrated; Real. Some of us cried as we spoke our word. The Shelter really hot home and brought the reality of homelessness right there in front of us. We were all affected like never before.

Fr. Joe had to comment on this and was grateful for our openness and honesty and understood and could see how we were touched by the experience. He compared us today to us form the last time we visited St. Joseph’s. He could see how much we had grown and how much more we have become involved. It was nice that he was with us and for me it gave me great comfort. Amen.

Little by little we all settled into our “beds” and drifted into sleep ready for the next day and the long bike ride down to Stratford.

We had to get up and leave before 9:00.

Goodnight BTCers. See you in the AM.

Lou