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**2016 Day Two - Sunday, 6/26 – Sacred Heart Parish, Wethersfield to St. Anthony Parish, Prospect to Holy Family Retreat Center, West Hartford**

We had a relatively quiet night sleeping in the church hall.  We were spread out on the floor, most with air mattresses or sleeping bags.  The snoring did not seem to bother anyone but me.  It was a bit chilly though and Joan and I curled up close to stay warm.  She needed a blanket but she did at least have her sweatshirt.  We are the lucky ones because we did have a roof over our heads unlike those sleeping outside in the cold air.

Most of us woke up early to get ready for our long ride to Prospect. Coffee was already made when I got up. Bagels and cream cheese and a banana were good for me.

After breakfast we waited for Eric who had left early in the day yesterday due to a prior commitment and Maureen who missed the evening and got stuck at home with a dead battery. Maureen was promptly there is the morning and Eric arrived exactly the time we wanted to depart, 7:30 am. This morning we lost some of our Support team, Rich, Steve, Melissa and Susan but gained Pat Curry, who would ride along with Joan and Chris Seethaler who would ride with Bob Sardo.

We had 30 miles with a lot of hills in front of us so we had to get off as soon as possible. We left without seeing anyone from Sacred Heart.

The ride began okay and then we began to hit some smaller hills. I knew this was going to be a tough day. As we rolled along the hills seemed to get more difficult. We noticed that the Cue Sheet for this ride was very similar in part to the Cue sheet we would follow to St. Thomas on Tuesday.

The hills began in earnest around Reservoir Road, although there was a great downhill as well. Wayne and I fell behind after the downhill because we did not have a Cue sheet and at the intersection at the bottom of the hill he did not know which way to go. I cycled back to help him but there he was on his way up the slight hill below. We rode together trying to figure out where the roads were even with the Cue sheet because he had it in his pocket and could not get to it without stopping and putting on his glasses. I took it from him so we could follow it and catch up. We finally did.

As we got closer to Prospect we noticed the time and it appeared we would be a little late for the 11:15 mass. We must have forgotten how difficult that hill was to get to the church. Yikes!! Miles up hill, a steady climb. It was grueling. I can’t believe I made it up. Claire had to get off the bike. Pam and John Ryan had a lot of difficulty but eventually made it. Praise the Lord!

We had to keep reminding ourselves that those in poverty have huge hills to climb everyday, 24/7.

Pam’s recollection… Those tough rides always make us think of people in poverty. John Ryan, Lauren and I all did struggle up those hills but we were all determined to finish what we started with the help of Wayne.

One of my words of the day was inept due to my inability to keep up with the group. People living in poverty must feel this way all the time.

I scampered over to the church to see Cheryl Tokarski, our contact from St. Anthony’s.

Cheryl showed me where to store the bikes, where the presentation would be held and where the reception for Fr. Mark’s 30 year anniversary would be held.

We slipped into mass a little late but without a lot of notice.

Mass was very nice in a beautiful more modern building. We all sat together. The music was great, with the organ, violin, and choir.

After mass we headed downstairs in the church for the reception.

Lots of food. Lots of people. None looked like they were going to stay for our presentation which was in a different building. We were worried.

However, Cheryl assured me she knew of quite a few folks who would be attending. She did say that it would have worked well if we presented in the church basement to capture the reception attendees.

By the way, the reception was quite well run and the goodies quite good.

The presentation was held in their communication room, a separate building. We were surprised how many people wondered over. The room was small but pretty much filled. We were surprised how many people wandered over. There were about 25-30 attendees. We were pleased.

The presentation was proceeding quite well until we were discussing the Root Causes of Poverty. One gentleman raised his hand to ask a question, actually to make a statement. He raised an issue we did not have as a root cause. It concerned family values and a culture based on dependency. It was similar to last evening’s concern about the breakup of the family and fatherlessness.

Pam felt the man that spoke out probably is in the majority of how people think about poverty. She gives him credit for speaking out but not in the way he did it. She thinks he would be a great person to continue dialogue with in the future.

John Ryan responded very well to this man’s concern. We continued. Up went the hand again. Same man, same question.

This time his “concern” took on a stereotypical slant, that poverty is self imposed and people shouldn’t have children they cannot afford. This comment upset me and I felt compelled to challenge this man. Looking back I am sure I mishandled the situation and let my emotions get away from me. WWJD? That is the question.

John Ryan and Claire stepped in and calmed the situation. Claire especially chose words that both spoke to this man’s concerns and the dignity of the people he was “concerned” about.

We continued the presentation. Again this man interrupted the presentation with the same question/concern trying to make his point. Finally another participant from the parish asked this man point blank, “What would you do about it?” This stopped the man in his tracks. No response. Unfortunately his wife walked out of the presentation and many of those that attended were uncomfortable.

When we finished there were several smaller discussions. A gentleman and his son came over and applauded us for our patience with this man. Cheryl apologized for the interruption and said she thoroughly enjoyed the presentation and that we should stay connected.

I handed her our new booklet created for starting or improving a Social Action plan by working through the Office of Catholic Social Justice. She was pleased.

We left St. Anthony’s after some photos and a bit gun shy form the presentation. We all agreed we had to talk about what happened later that night at Holy Family.

We got on our bikes and headed to Holy Family. Another lengthy ride but at least a lot of this portion would be down hill. In fact, that monstrous hill we had to come up was the first thing we hit.

Wow, what a ride. It seemed like it went on forever. Did we really cycle up that hill? It was almost hard to believe.

Too bad those in poverty do not see “downhills” or have an easy road even for a short time.

We finally made it to Holy Family. We got separated a few times here and there. A few of us got off the bikes but we were back at Holy Family, our respite thanks again so much to Fr. Terry. He is so wonderful to offer us to stay each year. Thank You! Thank You!

The only negative was that we arrived at Holy Family later than expected, those darn hills, and had to rush in and eat supper. Matt had to leave and did so without having supper. He would be missed.

The meal was exquisite. No showers first! We would attend the 7:00 pm mass as is. Fr. Terry requested we do so.

Of course mass was wonderful. I think we all expected that.

After mass we all showered and then hustled over to our meeting room while our support team handled the laundry duties.

We went around the room with the word of the day which is outlined below

Here are the words of the day.

Maureen: Support

John: Good Stuff – Surprising

At church-in-the-park, I remain haunted by the young woman, bright-eyed, looked healthy, very very dirty made me think she has a very secure hole to hide in every night ... for her safety, who just wanted some socks from among our donations. No wonder; she had nor shoes on her feet.

Wendy: Community

Bob S: Support is “easy”; Powernap in presentation; Understand

Fr. Terry: Awareness; Liked that we were mentioned during mass

Wayne: Evolution; Growth

Eric: Joy

Gary: Frustration

Claire: Insulated

Johnnie: Listening; Love

Lauren: Support; Connection

Pam: Challenging; Frustrating; Inept

Lou: Reinforced; Caring

Chris: Clueless; Proficiency; One

Tom: Supported; Privileged; Derailed

In the midst of the word of the day we had our discussion of what happened during the morning’s presentation. I felt I took a lot of “heat” for my actions which I apologized for but it hurt a little to hear what was being said. I understand that we (I) have to be better at how we respond to situations like this morning so as not to alienate, dismiss, or “attack” anyone who has a different opinion.

The discussion was lively for sure, a lot of it good and enlightening.

We did agree to preface our presentations with a comment about a limited time to speak and to hold all questions to the end.

What followed caused frustration on my part and perhaps I said more than I should have. I know my frustration came from the part of the discussion about our purpose and mission and the part we all play in that regard. I guess I felt a bit unsupported.

Maybe I was tired. I know I did not handle my emotions as I should have. I look back and am sorry for having said what I said.

I do KNOW that we are all committed to the mission of BTC and that’s why it works as well as it does. All of our compassion and all of our passion IS evident throughout the year and in what we do TOGETHER.

There were a lot of emotions going on that evening.

The conversation about the presentation brought on so many more issues and feelings that had never been talked about when we are all together. As in any group or family it is hard to hear what other people are thinking and feeling. Even though these conversations are tough and can be frustrating and hurtful - the group (family) will be better for it in the long run. We all have certain talents and skills that we bring to this group. We need to accept where each person is in their life and appreciate what they bring to the team. That is what makes BTC such an amazing group!

We left that night all a bit frustrated and concerned. Did I blow it?

*Yes, I believe I did*. But that compassion/love would engulf me and bring me back to the group. I thank you all.

Done by Lou, with help from Maureen, John and Pam.