

**2018 BTC Journals**

**Day One -Manchester to Hartford to Hamden**

I began my day cycling over to St. Bridget with the anticipation of another exciting Brake the Cycle of Poverty ride.
I assumed there would be other team members there as we had to leave as close to 6:00 am as possible in order to be at Sparrow Ministries in Hartford to serve beginning at 7:00 am.
Joan told me not to rush as no one would be at the church when I got there.
I left my house at 5:20 or so and arrived at St. Bridget at 5:45.
No one was there but me.
It was a cool ride over.  I sat down and waited with the hope everyone would be there soon.
Little by little people arrived.  First Wendy pulled in.  Then Johnnie and Lauren and soon all were there including a couple of first time riders Catherine and Patrick.
We began to pack our Support vehicles making sure each was equipped with the necessities, a biking pump, tubes in case of flats, Gatorade, water , etc.
Cyclists were getting anxious to begin.
Jim came up from Stratford. Pam, Maureen, Tom Sacerdote, Tom Breen among the group. We had Maureen's friend Mary as a new Support person.  We also had Marie, Johnnie F's sister-in-law again this year.
It would be a good ride.
Finally we gathered for out send off prayer.
I lead with a prayer of thankfulness and hope and a safe trip. We got started around 6:15.
It was chilly. Many of us wore jackets over our cycling jerseys.
It also began to rain.  Made it chillier.
We arrived at Sparrows without incident.
We carried our bikes in and lined them up net to the stage as we had done in the past.  Vicki and Richard greeted us as they did over the past three years.
But this year was different.  We arrived in time to see the line of clients waiting to be served.  We were early enough to hear Richard lead the morning with a prayer thanking Jesus for the opportunity to be together.  There were other prayers that morning asking for God's blessing.
Very humbling experience.
So, some of us began to serve breakfast and coffee while other of us began to mingle with the clients.  Mingling is difficult because you do not know how you will be received.  I usually comment that they must be wondering why we are there in our cycling getup.  I always extend my hand, say my name and usually that seems to break the ice and you hear another sad story on how this individual got to where they are.
I talked to a couple of guys who had been recently in prison and they mentioned how difficult it is to land a job as a result.  No one wants to give them a second chance it seems.  They are down and out but still hopeful and thankful for Sparrow Ministry.
This year the overall feeling I got from the clients was far more positive than past years.  That made me more hopeful but it is still hard to witness the struggles of these brothers and sisters of ours.
The struggles of Tom, Pablo, Sam, and Peggy.
We did get to help one gentleman, Scott, with his bike.  Johnnie and I helped "fix" his brakes.  His bike was in bad shape and his only means of getting around.  We did our best to help.  The assumption was that because we were cyclists that we can fix bikes.
It was nice to see Catherine and Patrick engaged with the clients, Catherine serving drinks and Patrick sitting and talking to clients. Seems they were very comfortable around him.  Good experiences for the both of them as it was for Kelly's son, Braeden.
We also had the opportunity to be videoed and interviewed by Fox 61 which is always good for us.  Good to get our message out there!
We were thanked by Richard and Vicki and after a few photos left for our ride down to Hamden.
The ride to Our Lady of Mount Carmel was long with a few "tough" hills.  Some of us had to take the hills slowly, even stop and get off the bike, but everyone hung in there and we made it.  It was a little chilly as it rained some. We had one flat tire, Catherine.  We stopped in Rocky Hill to fix it.  Did not have the right size tube for her hybrid.  Luckily Tom Sacerdote had a tube he thought would fit her bike.  Seemed to be right but when we pumped it up to the air pressure Catherine usually uses the tire exploded and almost knocked me off my feet.  Johnnie decided to ix the tube with a patch and because of the spot where the leak was compressed nicely on the tire, Catherine had no other problems and successfully cycled all the way without further incident.
We did get separated once as the lead group got out ahead a bit too far and one of our two groups took a wrong turn.  We stopped for lunch and eventually we all go together.  No one got lost.  No one was upset.  Sometimes things happen and you roll with it.  Lessons get learned.
After lunch, we cycle to St. Joan of Arc parish which is not closed and would be where we would be sleeping that night.
When we got there, we could not get into the "rectory" house.  No key although Sister Anne had indicated there would be one there.  She could not be contacted as she was down in Florida.  So we waited.  We tried to contact Fr. Dolan down at Our Lady of Mount Carmel.  John Ryan and I decided we would go down to that church to see what was going on while the rest of the team showered and ate supper brought over by some parishioners.
Showers were cold as there was no hot water.  Talk about being in solidarity with the poor.
There was some confusion as to when our presentation would take place.  Some of the parishioners understood we would be presenting Sunday after the 8:00 am mass.  We were expecting to present after the 5:00 vigil mass.
When John and I got down to Our Lady of Mount Carmel no one was around.
We went to the rectory.  No answer.  There were cars parked out back so we kept trying every door.  Finally, Fr. Dolan came and greeted us.  However, he seemed oblivious as to where and when we would be presenting.
We told him we wanted to present after the 5:00 mass.  He asked for a few notes so he could introduce us at mass and invite parishioners.  Not really the best expectation for a good crowd as it seemed they were totally unaware.
Fr. Dolan "gets it" but he was not ready for us'
We did get an introduction at mass and Johnnie F got up a said a few words about us and invited all to come to our presentation.  Problem was that the presentation was in the basement in the "library" room and seemed quite a distance for folks to come down to.
My expectation was low and it worked out that way.  Ten people showed up for the presentation but we followed through on it and did what we could to make a difference.  The presentation went well and was timely and well received.
We had a good evening and everyone seemed to have a good night. The food was good, lasagna and nice desserts.  We made a beer run so some of us could enjoy a light drink before "the word of the day".
We proceeded to continue this tradition and soon afterward most of us retired for the night.
All in all a good first day except for the low turnout. But we bonded as a team for this year's ride.
We said our "goodbye's" to Catherine as she could only ride with us this day.
I am sure she is hooked for the future.

Word of the Day:

Maureen - Renewal
Patrick - Nourished
John Ryan - Mission
Wendy - Holy Spirit
Pam - In the Moment
Lou - Satisfied
Johnnie - Fun
Catherine - Insight
Ed - Eye Opening
Jim - Serving
Kelly - Called
Braeden - Complications
Tom Breen - Vulnerable
Lauren - Appreciation
Mary Kosicki - Grateful
Joan - Uninvolved

**Day Two – Meriden to West Hartford**

Day 2 started with us all waking and getting ready to go over to Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish for greeting folks after their 8:00 am mass and coffee and donuts.
John Ryan and Pam left us last night and would not be here today.
We picked up Doris for Support today.  This would be a new experience for her.
Also, Joe and Katie would be riding with us today.
Some of us attended the mass.
I can't remember if Fr. Dolan mentioned we would be at coffee and donuts.
We anxiously wondered if folks would stop by.
We were pleasantly surprised at the turnout and we were able to engage folks there.  Granted they were a "captive" audience but it worked out fine.
Johnnie and I had a great conversation with John who was a construction guy there with his wife and two kids.  He was into the social justice thing and related well to our mission.  Totally an enjoyable conversation. It sure beat the previous evening.
I think we all were so better prepared for our ride this morning after this little gathering.  We thanked Fr. Dolan for hosting us and we began the long ride to West Hartford and Holy Family.
The ride was not very difficult but it was long.  Yes, there were some hills but not to bad.  We had most of the day to get to Holy Family but it was still a little hard for some.
We stopped for a Subway lunch and were nourished for the remainder of our ride.  The ride was uneventful and we arrived at Holy Family in plenty of time to shower and get ready for supper.  We would eat first, present and then go to the 7:00 pm mass there which is always spectacular.
The food was great.  Fr. Terry was a bit concerned regarding the expected turnout.  Well, he had a right to be concerned.  Only 6 folks showed up.
We presented anyway and it also got more of those of the team who do not regularly speak a chance to speak this evening.
Fr. Terry was not pleased with the turnout.  It is what it is.
We finished our presentation is time to get to mass and we all enjoyed that part of the evening.  We were "presented" during mass as we stood out in the crowd with our orange tee shirts.
We all enjoyed the mass and the music.
We adjourned to our meeting room for refreshments and the word of the day.
So nice to end with that.
We are all so grateful for Fr. Terry's hospitality.  He is so good to Brake the Cycle.

Word of the Day - lost the list

**Day Three – West Hartford to Oxford/Ansonia**

We began the day with 7:00 am mass with Fr. John as usual when we stay overnight at Holy Family.  We are always bolstered by his words and many times they resonate throughout the day.
We noticed something different this time. Fr. John did the sign of peace at mass.  First time we can recall.  We were all pleasantly surprised.
After mass we all got together for breakfast. I always enjoy this time as we reflect on the previous day and get ready to start the next.
We would be picking up Tom Sacerdote and Claire this morning.  Pam would be back. We would be losing Patrick.  Totally enjoyed his company and I believe he is hooked for next year.  I let him keep my jersey as long as he promises to ride again next year.
Can't wait to have Tom back we missed him last year.
We lose Mary, Kelly, and her kids but get John Ryan back for Support.  We also pick up Marie, Johnnie's sister-in-law for the net three days.
Today we would be riding to Oxford first and then some of us would be riding further to Ansonia.  Two parish presentations tonight.
Not looking forward to today's ride because there is going to be lots of hills.
We started off with our prayer and after some pleasant cycling began to hit those hills probably around the 7 mile mark.
I cycled in the back with Claire and Tom and Pam.  Many of us did not train like we should have and even the smaller hills were tough.  Claire and Tom stopped and rested at certain levels of the hills I would pass and tell them I would wait for them at the top.  We did that often and it actually helped me as well to get through the day.
All was okay until we hit Jack's Hill.  Yikes!  That is the hill shown in our slide presentation when we talk about the hills and how we struggle to get up them.  Hills are difficult but not as difficult as the hills those in poverty climb every day of their lives.  We do it for a few hours, a few days and then it is done. But the hills are our way of relating to those who struggle daily.
We finally arrived at St. Thomas the Apostle in Oxford. When we arrived seemed no one was their but Ft. Tom Shepard pulled up shortly after we got there.  We discussed our course of action and those of the team that would be staying for the supper and presentation at St. Thomas bid the rest of us goodbye for now.
We cycled the next 10 miles to Ansonia and arrived safely at Assumption parish with Fr. Jim Sullivan.  There were not any significant hills on this part of the ride.
So we settled in.  John and I went with Sean, the Seminarian staying with Fr. Sullivan, who helped us get ready for our presentation set up in the parish basement. The remainder of those at Assumption were getting settled in to where they would be spending the night.
It was a bit chaotic but we got through it.
Once settled we began talking with the women working diligently in the kitchen to prepare our supper meal.  This is where we got to meet Donna. What a dynamo.  She is the example of what it means to be dedicated to a cause. Her energetic personality is certainly catchy. We not only got fed so wonderfully by these women but we got to hear about Donna's brother, Brian, and what has motivated Donna into her mission going forward.
Brian's Bags.  We did not get the details until we were in the middle of our presentation and Donna was sitting in the front row and began crying as we proceeded in our presentation.  She interjected her story of Brian and Brian's bags.
Brian was Donna's brother.  He was homeless. His story is moving.
Brian was working in the Financial area in New York and was quite successful. Then 9/11 happened and it affected him dramatically and changed his life for the negative. He could not deal. He moved in with Donna for a short some time but still had a problem. He left her and they lost touch. He eventually would up on the street, homeless. She did not know what happened to him.
The story continues.  The bones of what they assumed was a homeless man were found in the woods in Ansonia and Fr. Jim wanted to do something for this homeless person.  He wanted to give this person a proper funeral.  He asked his congregation to come to a funeral mass for a person they did not know.  The question, would anyone come.  Well over 300 parishioners came to this funeral mass, a funeral mass for a complete stranger. So very powerful to me.  Well, come to find out, the bones were the bones of Donna's brother Brian.  Since that time Donna dedicated her life to helping the less fortunate.  That's when she came up with the Brian's Bags.  These were large zip-loc plastic bags filled with essentials, toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, deodorant, granola bars, etc.  Little survival kits.
She made up hundreds and she distributes these to the homeless.  Most of the time on the New Haven green but has been all over the state.  She also makes sleeping mats out of plastic bags for the homeless. She has a bunch of women from the parish on her team of workers to assist her.  What a moving, inspiring, passionate ministry.
She was planning on delivering 400 hundred Brian’s bags to New York something before the end of the month.  Some of our BTC team asked if they can assist.  Donna welcomed the assist.
We were all so overwhelmed with Donna and her commitment.  It made our evening so much more special.
So half the group was going to be presenting here at Assumption while the other half presented at St. Thomas the Apostle in Oxford.
I kind of wished i could have been in both places because from what we heard the presentation there was quite an event.  John Ryan was in his element and provide quite the dynamic presentation regarding Advocacy.  Also, I heard that Katie and Joe did awesome for their first real participation in our presentation.  All went well down in Oxford.
Our presentation at Assumption was also eventful. Ed presented for the first time as did Wendy.  We were all taken in when Donna broke down during the presentation as she was so moved by what we were talking about and she shared her ministry with us.
All in all both presentations were great and the meals we received from both parishes blew us away. What great hospitality!
The Oxford folks finally arrived at Assumption and we spent the night together.
We did the Word of the Day in the parish house living room. Sean and Fr. Jim joined us.
End of a beautiful day.
Word of the Day

Encouraging - Lou
Loved - Tom Sacerdote
Love - Sean
Deja vu - Tom Breen
Humble - Pam
Faith - Maureen
Johnnie - ?
Grateful - Marie
Holy Spirit - John Ryan
Fear - Jim
Claire - ?
Participate - Wendy
Integral - Lauren

**Day Four – Ansonia to New Haven to Hamden**

We would be without Joe, Katie, and Ed as their last day of the ride was yesterday. We will miss them.

The next morning at breakfast we were again fed by Donna and a few others.  She gave us a number of bags to distribute at the New haven green later that afternoon plus a good number of $5 McDonald's gift cards to pass out. We welcomed her "gifts" to us but were more impressed with the gift of herself.

After breakfast we went to mass in the chapel in the parish house.  The chapel had a Sistine Chapel type painted ceiling.  An artist who staying with Fr. Jim for a while asked if he could do this and was encouraged to do so.  What a beautiful, beautiful job this artist did.  I was in awe.   This made our morning mass more special.

To add to the specialness of the mass was Fr. Jim's homily. He talked about being poor as a kid and how that made him a more humble, caring person and helped him become the priest his is today.  Very moving.

After mass we all began to gather up our gear and prepared to set off for our next destination. We would head toward Columbus House in New Haven.

The ride to get there was not too difficult.  We just had to watch traffic and keep a good pace.  We did get to stop here and there an engage some folks.  Claire met a gentleman just before we made our turn onto Ella Grasso Blvd toward Columbus House. She talked with him at length and we passed out a gift card to him and he said he would pass along our message to his friends.

We also came upon a homeless man at one of the traffic lights.  We stop and chatted with him.  He was out early trying to connect with passing cars.  We gave him some of our goodies and he was so grateful.  Personally it made me so sad and brought tears to my eyes to see this something I have seen too often but cannot get used to.  No one should have to "beg" for help on a street corner or at a traffic light in this state or any other state in this country.  It made it even more difficult for me that the rode was in such disrepair.  I hung back from the group from that point until we came in sight of Columbus House.  I was feeling this man's pain.

It was a nice respite getting to Columbus House.  Jim went in to assure they were expecting us and he came out with Sheree DiMario who is the Development Coordinator for Columbus House. She talked to us outside as clients were finishing their lunch and we did not want to interfere with the process.  We got a nice education about what Columbus House does to help end homelessness.

We also met John Brooks, Chief Development Officer and he provided additional education to us.  It is always good to learn and get the different perspectives of those who serve.

Columbus House opened its doors in 1982 to provide services for men and women at least 18 years of age. Their goals quickly broadened from the mere provision of food and shelter and simple survival, to understanding and working toward overcoming the problems which cause people to become homeless.

Columbus House, along with its core of loyal supporters, friends and volunteers, has remained committed to fulfilling its mission: "To serve people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, by providing shelter and housing and by fostering their personal growth and independence."

In order to accomplish their mission, Columbus House relies on government grants as well as contributions from the private sector including businesses, foundations and individuals. It is also because of their extensive base of volunteer support and collaborative partnerships with a number of community-based service providers that they are able to offer such a broad continuum of care for those experiencing homelessness.

Outreach & Engagement programs offer services to clients who are literally homeless by reaching out to them wherever they are living.

Columbus House provides shelter for women, men, Veterans, and families. Shelter services include case management, referrals to mental health and substance abuse treatment programs, employment training programs, education, health services, and links to housing.

Central to their commitment to ending homelessness is housing. Through Housing Services, Columbus House staff work with clients to get into housing and access the services they need to stay housed indefinitely.

Columbus House serves over 150 people who are living in apartment buildings and duplexes that are dedicated specifically for supportive housing.

Getting people into their own homes is just half the challenge; the other half is helping them to *stay* there. All clients who are housed—whether through housing vouchers or short-term financial assistance—will need income to stay in that home indefinitely. Their Income and Employment services help individuals and families increase their income through benefits counseling and employment services.

We were given a very nice tour of the Columbus House facility and were a bit hampered by time.  We had limited time as we had to be at our next stop and it appeared we would be a bit late getting there.  Thankfully we did not have a long way to go.

We said out goodbyes and thanked Sheree for her expertise and she invited us back. It would be nice to touch base again down the road.

So now we were on our way to Musical Intervention, a stop Jim set up through his friend Adam Christoferson, founder of this ministry.

We arrived there in a relatively short time. We had to deal with the traffic situation in downtown New Haven.  A bit perilous but exciting at the same time.

Once we got there we were all intrigued to learn about this ministry.

Adam was not there but his staff began educating us on what they do there.

MI is an assimilation program that offers individuals and groups of special needs to take part in the transformational power of creating original songs. They specifically work to use the power of music to serve the homeless, at-risk youth, veterans and those suffering from substance abuse issues and mental illness.

We found this quite fascinating and were very pleased we made this stop on this year's ride.

After this visit we cycled up to the New Haven Green.  The Support folks would find this a bit difficult. Very difficult to find a parking spot but they somehow did.

We unloaded the lunches we made at Assumption parish, began a further education of observing the many people visiting the Green.  We had those McDonald's gift cards from Donna to distribute.  We had some Brian's Bags as well.

Problem, how to you know who is homeless.  You cannot really tell and it is a bit awkward to walk up to someone and ask if they are homeless. Well, I asked Loren to come with me as we began walking around the center of the Green trying to decide who we should engage.  We first approach four men and began a discussion.  They were indeed homeless and after a few minutes we handed over the $5.00 gift cards and we thanked profusely.  We then moved on, met some youth group also there on the Green to engage young folks and offer some education programs they were promoting.  I do not remember their organization name but it was nice to engage them.

We then went back to where the team was enjoying their lunch and began to notice people moving in our direction who asked if we were giving out gift cards.  We handed out what cards we had left.  We handed out the few Brian's bags we had. We began to notice more people, way more than we had handouts for.  It almost became somewhat of a concern but most of these homeless folks understood.

We did hand over some of our leftover sandwiches. We passed out some of our other goodies like cookies and cake from some of our other visits.  We did the best we could to satisfy as many people as we could.

It was an overwhelming experience. Glad it worked out.  We did get a few that tried to get "seconds" and had to actually challenge them.  Again quite an experience.  Something Donna and her volunteers must experience on a regular basis.

Finally, we gather up and mounted our bikes and headed off to St. Rita's parish, actually Divine Mercy, its new name.

The ride to Divine Mercy was very straight forward.  We just cycled up the main street and got there pretty quickly.  We actually met Fr. Joe DiSciacca and Gabriella at St. Stephen's convent which was also part of the new Divine Mercy parish.  Fr. Joe explained we would be staying the night there and would be presenting there rather than at St. Rita's.

So, we began dispersing to find our "spots" where we would be bedded down in the Convent. We were all over the place.  All on different floors.

We began getting ready for showers only to find that the showers either had no water, too cold or extremely hot showers.  It was an inconvenience to say the least but something that those is poverty must experience regularly. We just have to accept it as being in Solidarity with the poor.

So we gathered for supper and began preparing for our presentation.

As I remember it we did not have any problems that evening.  All went well.

We did the word of the day and prepared for bed.

Looking forward to the Day five.

Word of the Day

Eye Opening - Pam

Judgmental - Marie

Wowed - Lou

Joy - Tom S

Confused - Maureen

Emitsbury, Maryland - Tom B

Okay to Fail - Johnnie

Spiritual Poverty - Claire

Humbling - Jim

Rainbow/Hope - Wendy

Holy Spirit - John Ryan

It's God's Time - Lauren

**Day Five – Hamden to Windsor**

So here it is the morning of Day 5.

We have our breakfast at St. Stephen's and say goodbye to Fr. Joe.

We cycled over to St. Rita's as that is where the Cue Sheet for that day was to start.

The ride over there was exciting as we had some steep downhills to negotiate. Always interesting in the morning but all was well.

Following the Cue Sheet was not difficult and our ride to Windsor would be quite uneventful.  Seemed it was a straight shot, just a long ride.  All we had to do was keep cycling forward and take it slow and easy. We did not have to experience any of those wicked hills and it seemed we all enjoyed the ride.

It makes me feel blessed to be with this bunch of advocates riding our bikes for a just cause. I wish we could gain more attention than we do.

Speaking to this, we do get some attention when we cycle through a city as we had to do to get to Windsor.  We went right up Main Street in downtown Hartford. Of course, we get to interact with folks here and there when we stop for whatever reason, mostly for stop lights.  I always find this part of our ride rewarding to a good degree because it gives us a chance to be visible and also to engage.

So, after a long days ride (can't remember where we had our lunch) we got to St. Gabriel's parish, now part of St. Damien of Molokai in Windsor.

We apparently arrived earlier than expected as no one was their to greet us or open the doors.  We were waiting for our contact, Martha Erickson, the parish secretary or anyone to let us in.

While waiting, Claire and some others perused the garden area while the others of us snacked a bit.

We would be saying goodbye to Lauren this evening.  She would not be with us on our last day.  Lauren is a great addition to our team and always keeps us honest and hangs right in there each and every day no matter the difficulty. Plus, she has a lot to say that is thought provoking.  We will definitely miss her.

Little by little people began to show up and we were able to begin setting up for our last presentation and get fed by the St. Gabriel parishioners.

Nice pasta dinner and good desserts.

It was time for the presentation and we got into it as always.  We had a few presentations that seemed to be longer n time than we wanted so we were hoping to keep on a good pace this evening.

Well as was going smoothly until we came to the slide that speaks to the last letter of PEDAL, the Love slide.  On that slide is a photo of Joe the Barber from a news article from several years ago.  The photo depicts Joe hugging a homeless gentleman whom he had either just shaved or cut his hair.  You see, Joe gave haircuts and shaves to the homeless in Bushnell Park and all he asked in payment was a hug.  What a perfect sign of Love.

As I pointed to this photo someone shouted out the "he is here!".  Who?  "Joe, the barber."

Sure enough there he was sitting in the audience as a participant listening to our stories.  He stood up, acknowledging our welcome so I just had to go over and, of course, give him a hug! This was the best "Holy Spirit" moment of the ride this year.

The place was full of excitement and it was such a perfect ending to the week's presentations. Who would have thought after all these years we would get to actually meet Joe the Barber.

Sad part is he is no longer allowed to give those haircuts or shaves in Bushnell Park.  Health reasons or something like that.  Funny thing is that Joe is not a licensed barber.

We were also so glad that Fr. Andy showed up toward the end of our presentation.

This was his parish at the time.  Fr. Andy was one of our parishes at St. Bridget until he transferred two years ago to this parish.

Finally, everything winded down and we packed the bikes and headed over to Holy Family for the evening.

There we would settle into the rooms we previously had and would end the day with the Word of the Day as always.

Great day today!

Word of the Day

Holy Spirit Moment - Lou

Serendipity - Tom S

Real Deal - Jim

See You - Wendy

Team - John Ryan

Water - Claire

Direction - Pam

Acts of Kindness - Maureen

Re-direct - Mary Breen

Extremes - Tom B

Perspective - Johnnie

Crazy Time - Joan

**Day Six – West Hartford to Hartford to Manchester**

As usual we began the morning going to 7:00 am mass with Fr. John.  Little did we know this would be our last mass with him. Something we will surely miss.

After mass and Fr. John's words of wisdom we settled in to breakfast.

Marie will not be with us this last day, nor will Lauren who left us last night. We will miss them.

Leaving Holy Family we headed into Hartford.  Our first stop would be at Southside Family Center and see Ranie Busgith who I met at the Bishop Peter Conference and who invited us to visit their facility on this ride.

Southside is part of Catholic Charities.  Southside Family Center is an educational support center for the whole family with the primary goal of improving the school readiness of the children that reside in Southwest Hartford. The program also offers services that help to strengthen family and community relationships. Parents play a major role in designing programs that reflect the needs of the community. A flexible schedule for services is provided to accommodate both working and at-home parents. Childcare is provided while attending classes

We found out that Ranie would not be available and we met with Luis Santiago instead.  The thing that impressed most of us as we were educated on the services Southside provides was the input from the fathers.  This is something we had not heard before.  How much the fathers were involved with their kids.  Seems like we always hear how the dads are never around, well here, they are.  It was a nice thing to hear.

Several of the staff spoke on their responsibilities and we were impressed with what they get accomplished here.

Turned out this was a surprise visit and I am grateful I ran into Ranie.

We said out goodbyes and headed over to Senator Blumenthal's Office for our annual visit.  Usually we meet with Rich Kehoe but today we will be speaking with Joe Rodriguez.

We did our usual speaking to these specific themes; Immigration; Healthcare; Nutrition; and Care for Creation.

Joe was pretty attentive and we appreciated his knowledge and interest.  He seemed to take us seriously and took notes as we engaged him.

We hope we are making some impact with these annual visits.  I am sure we should be doing more.

We left Blumenthail's Office and headed to Bushnell park for lunch.  After lunch we would be going to Senator Murphy's Office for a similar visit.

We met there with our "friend" Kenny Curran.

This meeting was conducted similar to our visit with Joe Rodriguez but here Kenny did not take any notes and we felt a little let down and that he was somewhat not engaged with us.

This has lead us to discuss how can we be more effective in the future.  Are these meetings worth the time? Are we having any impact?

We just have to trust in the Holy Spirit that we are.  Otherwise, who knows?

We now headed into Manchester and our next stop, Community Health Resources.

We were supposed to meet with Annette Diaz but she was not in this day and we met with a young woman whose name I cannot remember but who was very impressive with her knowledge and was relatively comfortable meeting with us without a real heads up.

We all learned something from her.

CHR is the most comprehensive, non-profit behavioral healthcare provider in Connecticut, offering a wide range of personalized services for children, families and adults whose lives have been touched by mental illness, addiction or trauma.

CHR’s mission is to help adults, children and families find Real Hope for the challenges of Real Life through an array of community- based mental health, substance use, child welfare, supportive housing, foster care, prevention and wellness services, and integrated care.  Their name embodies their commitment to community-based care, instilling hope for a healthy, happy and productive future, and utilizing all available resources to achieve change.  CHR is proud to provide services that achieve Real Quality with Real Results.

CHR’s history dates back to the mid-1960’s, and since its creation, they have become a trusted community resource and well-respected service provider. Throughout their history, they have added new programs, grown into new locations, collaborated with other healthcare providers and recruited exceptional staff to meet the needs of the clients they serve.

Today, they employ more than 700 experienced professionals, including licensed therapists, psychiatrists, child psychiatrists, case managers, and people with lived experience who provide expert care to more than 24,000 people every year.

We were grateful that we were able to find someone to substitute for Annette and it

made our last day of our 2018 ride that much better.

We then all headed back to St. Bridget and there said our goodbyes to one another and looked forward to the next adventure.

Peace to all.  Until next year's ride.