

**2019 BTC Journals**

**Day One -Manchester to Hartford to New Britain to Hartford to West Hartford**

Started early from St. Bridget Church to get to Sparrows Ministry at the South Congregational Church on Main Street, Hartford. This year we had two new cyclists, Terry Steele and Claudia Surprenant, but were missing some of our regulars like Pam and Maureen.

We gathered together, said our send off prayer as usual and got to Sparrows without incident. We met Tom Sacerdote there and we greeted Vicki and began to mingle with the guests. What I noticed more this year is that the team was more engaged with the guests. Everyone was seated at a table having a conversation with one or more guests. It was wonderful to see. I was most struck by the conversation I had with David. He was recently divorced and a bit reluctant to speak about it. He was choked up but shared his story. I listened. He lost his house. Lost his family. Was struggling to get by. You can see he was really, really hurt, down, alone. We talked for a while. He felt comforted I believe but remained very quiet. I told him I would be thinking about him a lot on this year’s ride. He broke my heart. Terry joined me at the table. She asked him if there was anything he could fix or ask for what would it be. He said more shelters. I get why he said that but we want to have less shelters and eventually no shelters. The plight of the homeless is so depressing. The daily struggle has to be so hard, so difficult. Not knowing if you can get in a shelter or where your next meal will be or your next shower. I know there are scheduled places for them to go but sometimes they just do not know what’s available. For the most part everyone there seemed to be comfortable enough to talk to us. I believe we did a good job to make them feel are sincerity. They thanked us for what we are doing and one individual actually texted Tom Sacerdote with some of the concerns he wanted us to share when we visited Blumenthal’s and Murphy’s offices. You can see there is a community of the homeless. This was a good experience for us as a start to our ride. Claudia and Terry were moved by it as were we all.

Claudia was struck by what she heard from one of the guests she approached. He thanked her for coming over to speak with him and not caring or considering how he was dressed. He felt blessed that she came over like he was like anyone else. The dignity of the human person in action.

We left Sparrows to cycle over to New Britain to Family Promise of Central Connecticut. We were met by Ed Liedke and his wife Cheryl who educated us on what they do.

Family Promise of Central Connecticut is a nonprofit shelter program dedicated to serving homeless families in Connecticut. They partner with churches of different denominations to host homeless children and families.

Within three years, Family Promise of Central Connecticut grew to include a core group of passionate volunteers representing 17 places of worship.  They officially opened their doors on March 5th, 2017 and the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Day Center took place on June 4, 2017.  They are all looking forward to the work of fulfilling their mission to end child and family homelessness…one family at a time.

The guest families start their days waking up at one of our Host Congregations.  Congregation volunteers provide breakfast, and everyone eats together. Families then travel to the Family Promise Day Center, which is a 2 story home located in New Britain. The families are driven to the FP Day Center in their van, which is driven by a staff member of Family Promise. Once the families arrive at the FP Day Center, they shower and prepare for school and work. School buses transport students to school from the FP Day Center, however, most of our families walk to school together.

Adult guests use the FP Day Center resources to search for housing and employment, often with help from Family Promise staff and volunteers.

At the end of the day, the Family Promise van takes families back to the host congregation. At the church, volunteers will greet the family and help them settle back into their private sleeping areas. Then volunteers and guests will dine together in a family setting. Evening activities for children may include homework, crafts, tutoring, or games. Adults may plan their next day’s search for work or housing, read to their children, talk with volunteers, or just relax.

After a week’s stay with the first host congregation, volunteers will help families move to another host congregation. Nine weeks is a family’s average length of stay in the program. Nearly 80 percent of guest families secure permanent or transitional housing before leaving Family Promise.

Family Promise is really doing some great work for the homeless. They are keeping families together. They are maintaining community. They service many towns in the area and are the only Family Promise facility in CT of the nearly 200 affiliates in the United States. They define “family” through the eyes of the child.

What I learned is that the children who are dropped off at the Day Center are bused to school by the school district they would normally belong to. It is that community’s responsibility. Did not know that. We always learn a lot with everyone we hear from and from those we visit with. For 17 years we have learned and still are learning.

We left Family Promise to cycle back to Hartford for a visit to a bike shop on Park Street that services the local community. The bike shop is called BiCiCo. We were expected to meet with Kathleen Maldonado whom I met at the Bishop Peter Conference a few weeks earlier and with Tony Cherolis but neither were there. We did get a nice explanation of what is done at BiCiCo by Rene who is one of the chief mechanics and Eli, a young person trained by the learning and education offered by BiCiCo.

Not only did the young people fix bikes, but they also took charge of showing us around the shop. Here were some very mature competent kids who worked in the shop. There were hundreds of bikes there to be fixed, many that were donated. If you have the need, you can get a bike, a helmet, and a lock for $20. What a deal!!

The [Center for Latino Progress](http://www.ctprf.org/), through its BiCi Co. program, is providing an opportunity to improve youth and adult safety, sustainable transportation, youth programs, mechanics classes, job training, and bicycles. Bici is short for bicicleta (bicycle) and Co. stands for comunidad (community).

BiCiCo was created by the [Center for Latino Progress](http://www.ctprf.org/) in June 2015 to provide an opportunity for hands-on bicycle education and service-learning projects for 30 summer youth interns. It grew from there to include DIY repair hours, teen Earn-a-Bike courses, among other offerings.

BiCiCo is committed to meeting the need for bicycle-centered programs to serve Hartford’s strong need for efficient, inexpensive and safe transportation. Bicycles offer healthy transportation while for engaging youth — providing miles of opportunity.

This was a fun visit because of the connection with bikes! What a community connected organization right in the heart of Hartford. We cycled on Park Street so many times these past years and never realized it was there. Past right by it.

We went over to Bushnell Park for lunch. Subway. Always a fun lunch.

We enjoyed each other in conversation about the day thus far. Everyone was moved by the day’s events.

We slowly moved to where Church by the Pond takes place. We reconnected with Andrew, a former team member, and also Nancy Jacobs from Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford who runs this program. It was nice to reengage this but it was somewhat surprising that there were not as many folks in the park for this mass as we remember from years ago.

The minister for mass liked to sing and we sang many songs at the start of mass, more than at any other mass I have ever attended. We even sang “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”. Would you believe it!

It was a nice way to wind down the day. After mass the homeless received their lunch as we expected. This ministry is there every Saturday afternoon rain or shine. So nice to be back.

So, next we cycled over to Wethersfield to Christ the King parish. We actually stopped in the Wethersfield Library for a quick visit with Patrick’s fiancé before getting to the church.

We attended the 4:00 pm vigil mass and after mass shared some supper with parishioners, social Justine committee members, as well as choir members. We did our presentation around 6:00 pm to about 50 in attendance. Quite a good audience for our first evening. Thanks goes to Nancy Kiely who coordinated this event and my son, Thad, who is the Musical Director at the parish. Our presentation went quite well with ally of the team participating. Great additions by Patrick, Terry, and Claudia.

So, we put the faces of Dennis, David, Chris, Jesse, Gloria, Earl, Wanda to the numbers and statistics we mentioned during our presentation. It made the numbers real!

During my telling of meeting Jesus, I mentioned how this day I was “reminded” several times as if Jesus was knocking me on the side of my head, three times “seeing” individuals pushing their load of empty bottle and cans. Wow! Holy Spirit moments.

We packed up the bikes on our support vehicles and headed to Holy Family for the night.

We found our rooms, showered, and gathered in the second floor lounge where we conducted the Word of the Day and also celebrated Fr. Terry’s 50th anniversary as a priest. Lots of fun and nice to relax. Great end to a first day. Cycled just over 38 miles.

One cool Holy Spirt type moment shared came from Braeden Knotts, Kelly’s son. This is how he Participated in Brake the Cycle of Poverty this year. While in the shower at home, before the ride, he shouted out to his mom that he was thinking he had more than enough chore money than he needed because he had everything he wanted. So he said he wanted to give half of the chore money to those who do have nothing and need it ore than he does. How cool is that from a 10 year old. Our first Holy Spirit moment.

**Here are our Words or Phrases of Day One:**

Johnnie F Community

Tom B Fun

Braeden Inspiration

Kelly Unity

Patrick Nourishing

Claudia Appreciative

Lauren Under 30

Terry Connection

Sue Coming Home

Fr. Terry Hospice Workers

John R Love of Jesus

Chris Glad to be back

Mary B Sublime

Joan Impressed

Wendy Relationships

Lou Blessed