

**Day One - Saturday, 6/22 -Manchester, St. Bridget to New London, St. Mary Star of the Sea**

The day began for me with a reminder of a message I received on the initial ride to Washington, DC.

As usual on the morning of our annual bike ride I cycle over to St. Bridget from home. It is a ride of a bit more than 2 miles.

As I approached St. Bridget, making a right turn toward Main Street, a gentleman, slightly disheveled, white messy hair and beard, came around the corner. He was pushing a shopping cart and in it were a large plastic bag filled with empty bottles and cans.

I immediately thought of Matthew from that original ride. My eyes teared up and I had to slow down because I had trouble seeing where I was going. I remember saying out loud, "Okay, Jesus, I get it". I did not ask the gentleman his name. What a way to start of 10th CT bike tour.

We gathered at St. Bridget around 7:00 am. Although they were not riding today, Bob and John were there to see us off. Seems this year we were down to a small contingent of cyclists especially on the first day due to illness, family situations, busy schedules, etc. Many will be missed.

Today we would only have 6 cyclists, me, Johnnie F, Pam, Eric, Tom S and Wayne.

I lead the group with a prayer as we gathered not knowing what to expect this year. We prayed we would do what Jesus intended for us to do and continue our mission. We also prayed for safety.

We left St. Bridget without incident. It was a beautiful morning to cycle. We went slightly more than 10 miles before we stopped for a break. All support vehicles, Sue and Joan, Wendy, Dave and Karen had kept us company as efficiently as usual. It is very comforting.

While we were standing there eating grapes and other refreshments all of a sudden Johnnie F just lost his balance and fell to the ground while standing still. It struck us all so funny and we could not stop laughing. No bumps, no cracks in the rode, no tire problems, he just fell over on his butt. Pam got a nice photo of it. Johnnie before.....Johnnie after.

At mile 16 we actually stopped at the Church of the Holy Family for a potty break. We were lucky the front door was opened and we could use their facilities. We would be back there the next morning after the 9:30 am mass.

The ride down to New London was uneventful although a lot of up and down hills. We stopped at a picnic area around mile 31 for lunch. We all enjoyed lunch purchased and delivered by our wonderful support crew. We enjoyed the time eating lunch because we had some time to kill before we had to be at St. Mary Star of the Sea.

The rest of the ride to the church was leisurely achieved.

We arrived at the church around 2:30. We gathered in the parking lot behind the church. We had scheduled a visit to Covenant House which is a shelter right on the Church property.

Covenant House is celebrating their 30th year of providing temporary emergency shelter to homeless men, women and families of all faiths and from all walks of life.

The Services they provide are:

* Temporary Shelter
  + 14 beds for single men, 3 beds for single females, 5 family rooms
* 3 Meals and 3 Nutritious Snacks a day
* Intensive Case Management
* Transportation Assistance
* Security Deposit / Rental Assistance
* Educational Classes and Programs
* Parent Education and Support Group
* Work Readiness Program
* On-Site After-school Tutoring/Mentoring Program for School-Age Children

The place was very clean and kept up well. Dennis was our host and showed us around. He has been there for five years and is very proud of his work there. He used to work construction, is now retired. He kept apologizing for the floor because it was not polished. He seemed very conscientious. His tour of the shelter was very informative and presented quite well. We thanked him and went over to the Rectory.

We were greeted at the door by Fr. Bob and Peter, a seminarian there helping out. Peter showed us where we would be sleeping, showering and breakfasting. Some of us couples actually had a double bed to sleep in.

We showered and got ready for the 5:00 vigil mass. Mass was great as they usually are. Fr. Bob spoke some about our mission and ride and invited folks to the potluck after mass. Unfortunately, there was no food. Also not many people in attendance. Pizza was ordered and we began the presentation while waiting for the pizza to arrive so as not to lose any of those folks that were there. Just like those in poverty you have to take what you get.

Overall the presentation went well. 42 minutes! New Participate and Dedicate slides worked well. Nice touch bringing in Pope Francis on the Dedicate slide. Thanks John!

We asked the folks there to write a simple letter as a "Take Action" step and all those who stayed did so. Felt good about that. We had a lively discussion during the presentation as well. One woman asked quite a few questions, challenged us some, but the engagement worked well for us.

The letters we got plus any others were receive at the end of our other presentations would be dropped off at the legislators offices on Monday and Tuesday.

Fr. Bob was disappointed with the attendance, apologized several times and said he would do better next time. He was a bit embarrassed but we told him we understand. He thinks because of his 30th anniversary as a priest on Sunday negatively affected us. Oh well, it is what it is.

We debriefed with a group meeting in the Rectory, discussed the day and decided when we would leave in the morning in order to bike to Holy Family in Hebron. 6:00 am was the decision. Kelly would be riding with us. We would lose Tom S and Wayne.

We all went to bed as early as we could in order to get a good night’s sleep to handle the uphills on the way to Hebron in the morning. It was a good day overall.

End of Day one.

Peace, Lou

**Day Two - Sunday, 6/23 -New London, St. Mary Star of the Sea to Hebron, the Church of the Holy Family to Marlborough, St. John Fisher**

We awoke around 5:00 am. We had a good morning ride to get to Holy Family before their 9:30 am mass. It was about 25 miles back up route 85.

Fr. Bob and Peter were up early to greet us for breakfast. They were great hosts to get up with us that early.

We had prepared last night for this early departure by pumping up our tires, getting our water bottles filled, etc.

After breakfast of cereal, toast with peanut butter we departed after a prayer right after 6:00 am. Only 5 of us riding today. Kelly, Pam, Eric, Johnnie, and me. It would be a fun ride.

Johnnie took to the lead right away. He was out there quite a ways for most of the 25 miles. Seemed he wanted to be sure we got there before mass.

I stayed in the back with Pam to encourage her to remain on the bike. She kept saying she was going to get off the bike because she was slowing us down. No way Pam!

The ride itself was not bad. Yes we hit some hills but we were ready for them. We were more worried about the traffic. Seemed everyone was in a rush and driving too fast. We had to really pay attention this morning.

Although Pam tried stopping several times I wouldn't let her quit. She hung in there the entire way.

Those in poverty do not get support or someone to encourage them to keep trying to move forward, to get up that hill or through that next life challenge.

We arrived at Holy Family parish before 9:00 am. We were graciously greeted by John McGill and Fr. Michael.

We decided to be greeters ourselves and also invited parishioners to attend our presentation after mass. So many people look at you kind of funny seeing us standing there is our cycling gear but a bit leery to ask us why we are there. This provides us with the opportunity to engage them in conversation.

It was a beautiful morning.

The mass was great. This parish community was very uplifting and we all got a sense of that during the mass. I think most of us felt this was special for whatever the reason. We were energized as a result. Fr. Michael asked the parish community to join him in a blessing of us and our mission. Johnnie was given a few minutes during mass to speak and invited folks to come after mass to our presentation. Fr. Michael did likewise at the end of mass. He seems like such a cool pastor.

He did something that we all commented on. During the "Our Father" he came down into the community with his two altar servers to join hands with those in the front row. Very touching. And, while sharing the sign of peace, he knelt down and greeted the little children as they approached him with a hug. Nice!

Downstairs there was coffee and some treats for us and those coming to the presentation. Although John McGill was disappointed with the turnout we were content with the 15 who did show up.

Before we started I was approached by two individuals separately who could not stay for the presentation. They asked if we raised funds and I advised we are not a fund raising group but nevertheless they each slipped a bill into my hand. Johnnie also got some cash. We decided we would use that money when we visited the soup kitchens in Hartford later in the week.

Our presentation lasted 44 minutes. We got all 15 attendees to write a letter. We advised them we would be delivering them Monday or Tuesday.

Afterward we hung around on the church grounds. They let us use the facilities and trusted us with locking the doors. How nice.

We had lunch there with Sue and Joan going out to get sandwiches for us. We had a lot of time to kill since we did not have to be at St. John Fisher until 5:00.

I had tried to set something up at St. Andrews in Colchester to fill this time but never heard back from them. So we hung around and talked. Ask Joan about how to eat potato chips was one subject discussed.

We left Holy Family around 2:30 and headed for St. John Fisher in Marlborough. It would be a 13-14 mile bike ride. It was hot and a bit humid now. I made the mistake of commenting that there were no real hills. Boy, was I mistaken. The hills were a killer and Pam didn't let me forget it.

When we got to St. John Fisher's, they were preparing for the potluck. We were lucky because the church has a regular potluck dinner monthly and our visit fit in nicely. We were greeted by Sheri Dursin, the parish secretary I was in contact with. The turnout was fantastic. 50 plus. The food was great and the discussions wonderful. Matt, Sheri's husband boomed out a welcome message and introduced us warmly.

Our presentation lasted 42 minutes and we got most attendees to write a letter. This action step, simple as it was, to write a letter about two things about poverty that they heard during the presentation and had not known, worked out quite well. This was the first ride we tried this and it seemed to go over well. And, we cut down on our presentation significantly to accommodate the letter writing.

This parish seemed very into Social Justice and said they were like family.

We left for Manchester energized for the next day.

End of Day Two.

Lou

**Day Three - Monday, 6/24 - Manchester to Hartford to West Hartford, Holy Family Retreat Center**

We started to arrive at St. Bridget's around 8:00 am, some at 8:30. We expected to leave for Hartford at 9:00.

It was forecast to be a hot, humid day. Based on our Participation list we were going to have around 10 or 11 cyclists this morning. We were scheduled to go to Senator Richard Blumenthal's office in the morning and a CCHD funded group office in the afternoon.

We lost Kelly but we picked up Lenora, our "embedded" reporter doing a story for the Catholic Transcript on our mission. We also picked up our "old" friend Charlie, Bob, John Ryan, Tom Breen and Eric's wife, Laura.

Again we prayed before we departed. We left right at 9:00 am. The ride was smooth and steady through East Hartford without incident although I fell at a traffic light because I did not unclip in time. I got right back up in a moment's notice. It reminded me of those in poverty who fall but cannot get right back up because the system keeps them down and makes it so difficult to get back on their feet.

We seem to have constant reminders like this when we ride reminding us why we are out there doing this.

We got to Constitution Plaza before our appointment time in Blumenthal's office. So, we began engaging people on the street talking about our mission. We had some good conversations although some people could really care less why we were there. We noticed some news people going into the building and hurried over to try and engage them. We were not successful. Channel 30 news was one of them. We found out the Senator Blumenthal was having a news conference regarding the student loan interest rate increase being considered by Congress.

We decided it was time to head up to his office. Our support folks stayed with the bikes. We got to the 7th floor but were asked to wait in the small entry way to Blumenthal's office. While we were there chatting about what we should talk about with him, out came one set of reporters, a radio program group I do not recall exactly who.

We tried to interact with them but they breezed right pass us like we were not even there. They were followed by a group of college representatives (don't know if any of you guys remember exactly who) who were there to provide reasons to keep the interest rate where it is now at 3.5%. The expected increase was to bring the interest rate up to 7%.

They told us that Senator Blumenthal was very supportive of not increasing the interest rate.

Then came Channel 30. We tried to interact with them as well. I handed Jeff Saperstone my card. He took it and wished us well on what we were doing. You would think that these people would wonder what a group of 10 people in orange and green cycling gear were doing outside of Senator Richard Blumenthal's office. I thought reporters were a curious group. Guess not.

We were lucky though. Dick Blumenthal stayed right there and greeted us one by one. He began talking openly and was quite friendly. We started asking him some questions and he was even more engaging. His staff kept prompting him to leave since he had to catch a flight but the Senator kept talking to us for 25 minutes. We were thrilled since he was very supportive if us and I think he impressed some of us more than we expected.

He shared one startling fact about the student loan interest rate. At the current rate of 3.5% the Federal government makes a profit of $51 billion. How outrageous is that! And they want to doubled the rate!!

He also shared with us that as a relatively new senator he was told by senior Democratic Senators that he was the new guy and to slow down and, my words here, "back off". We all found that very interesting.

After the Senator left, his staffers, Matt LeBeau and Jose Rodrigues, shared more information with us.

We brought up the issues that the Sequester is hitting the poor because of the across the board cuts. Head start is suffering as is Fed aid to education. These are not entitlements.

We heard info about the farm bill and that the House failed to pass. There are still subsidies for large farms not to grow crops. If no action is taken there will be an effective $4B cut to SNAP because it is the same as it was last year. The Republicans want larger cuts as well as cutting benefits to convicted felons and undocumented workers (the children will still be able to receive SNAP but many adults in these families will not apply for SNAP).

The daily draw down from Iraq is $3 B in savings.

They mentioned how frustrated they were too in this battle to end poverty. They asked us to continue to do what we were doing. It was a great continuation of what we had discussed with Senator Blumenthal. They gave us some more encouragement and asked us to keep in touch. It seemed to many of us that this was one of our best encounters with our legislators.

Once we got downstairs, we decided to have lunch right there on Constitution Plaza. This again gave us an opportunity to engage people on the street.

After lunch we pedaled over to UCAN, United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods. This group is a funded CCHD group. The ride over was so hot and humid. So uncomfortable. Another reminder about people in poverty who cannot get out of the heat and humidity.

They suffer every minute of every day, without relief.

We get a cool showered at the end of the day.

We met Sarah Hiller from the Office of Catholic Social Justice at this stop. She would ride the rest of the day with us to get a better sense of what we actually do.

We were greeted at UCAN by Ryan Lerner, the CCHD intern Wendy and I have been working with to secure some of these visits. This is part of our continued connection with CCHD.

Upstairs in the coolness of air-conditioning, we met Alta Lash, Executive Director of UCAN.

She began to educate us on what this CCHD funded group does through community organizing. We learned a lot more about SNAP and the ongoing problems, like the problems with DSS, their poor attitudes because they are so over worked and under staffed. SNAP qualifiers are reluctant to call to request SNAP because they are made to feel unliked, unwelcomed, like they are abusing the system. As a result they do not attempt to file for SNAP benefits. We have heard that around 25% of those who would normally qualify for SNAP do not because of this and because they are unaware on what to do.

We met Angela (I believe this was her name, please correct me if I am wrong), who worked in the office. She shared with us her story. Again and "Educate" moment.

She collects SNAP and Social Security for disability. She mentioned that if she gets an increase in her Social Security amount she gets a decrease in her SNAP amount. However, the decrease in SNAP is like twice what the increase is in Social Security. Fair? Not really.

She said she started out collecting $200 in SNAP benefits monthly. She is now down to $107 monthly and finds it very, very difficult to makes ends meet.

Alta, Angela, and Michael told us how difficult it is to work with DSS. They try and educate potential qualifiers but find it so hard and frustrating. They shared with us a document that DSS handed out to non-English speaking clients. The document stated if you cannot read English this document is meant for you. Only problem was that the entire document was IN ENGLISH!

This is a typical situation they run into. They also said the process is confusing to most and involves many pages. Also DSS was going to be changing their outdated computer system to hopefully help potential clients. This was supposed to speed up the process and make it easier for applicants to successfully get through the process. Hope so.

From what I heard last week the system has helped but there is still a significant wait time on the phone which has discouraged many. Hopefully in time this will improve.

We also talked about the Exchanges and the Affordable Care Act. This can really become an educational challenge to get low income folks into the Exchange. This will not be easy.

We left UCAN feeling a bit more frustrated.

On our way over to Holy Family Retreat Center, we stopped at a Daycare facility that Johnnie F was connected with at one time. Actually he and I did something similar a few years ago when we were staying at Holy Family.

We interacted with the little children who were fascinated by our bikes. They were so cute, innocent and so curious. We let some sit on our bikes. They were happy we came. We only stayed a short time.

On the way to Holy Family we had some differences with the Cue Sheet and which way we should go to get there. changing the Cue sheet after someone has spent time driving the route, typing up the Cue, etc. disempowers that person. Sort of what happens to people in poverty all the time. We have to do a better job of avoiding doing this.

We arrived at Holy Family sweaty and tired. We all showered and felt refreshed.

Fr. Terry, our exceptional host, provided refreshments/snacks before dinner. And what a marvelous diner it was! Thank you Fr. Terry!

Everyone was grateful and so satisfied. Those in poverty do not these opportunities and luxuries.

After dinner we presented to a sparse group but still worthy of our presentation which lasted 42 minutes. We also got those few folks to write letter.

We engaged with some of the attendees afterword. Fr. Terry was disappointed with the turnout but we assured him we know he did all he could to get people there and that we appreciated that he asked us to come and speak there again.

All in all in was a great night and we looked forward to the next day.

We all gathered afterword and discussed the day's events. We should do this every night.

End of Day 3.

Lou

**Day Four - Tuesday, 6/25 - West Hartford, Holy Family Retreat Center to Hartford to East Hartford, St. Christopher Parish**

We awoke to the 7:00 am mass with Fr. John Baptist Pesce. Excellent mass as always. Best way to start the 4th day of our ride. We ate breakfast after mass and the support crew made sandwiches for later in the day. Today we were expected at MANNA Community Meals Soup Kitchen in downtown Hartford.

This connection came about through my interaction with the Hand on Hartford project group I met at the Legislator breakfast sponsored by CABHN earlier in the year.

This soup kitchen is located at 45 Church Street in Christ Covenant Church basement.

Today we would also be stopping at Chris Murphy's office in Hartford at 2:00 pm.

We got off to a later than expected start. We had to deal with the traffic and construction work on Farmington Avenue too.

We had 10 cyclists this morning to start. Fr. Stephen would eventually meet us at MANNA but we would lose Sarah.

We got to MANNA Soup kitchen and were greeted by Emily Kaas the volunteer coordinator for this group. She provided a quick education about the work they do.

Last year 2500 volunteers helped out with the Hands on Hartford projects.

MANNA stands for Meals, Assistance, Neighboring, Nurturing, and Advocacy. They are a special group.

Here is their Mission:

*Hands On Hartford, in partnership with others, strengthens community in Hartford by responding faithfully to people in need through programs that change lives and renew human possibility.*

They provide direct services to people in need by promoting civic engagement and volunteerism. Their vision is to bring agencies, volunteers, congregations, community organizations, donors and businesses together to make a significant impact on our community.  
  
Hands On Hartford specializes in creating volunteer opportunities for groups or teams of volunteers from throughout Greater Hartford. They provide volunteer opportunities for teams formed within congregations, civic groups, service clubs, youth organizations, businesses, or any other group of individuals that wants to come together in service. We emphasize service learning as part of the volunteer experience.

They also sponsor Faces of the Homelessness, a speaker's program where the speakers are currently or formerly homeless individuals. We should learn more about this program.

Emily filled us in on what she expected us to do today. We were actually lucky that a small group of volunteers from Travelers Insurance gave up their volunteer time so that we could experience this service to the needy. Seems like the Holy Spirit intervened for a purpose here.

We served the clients restaurant style and I, for one, was moved to tears because I had not ever experienced this before.

So many were so thankful for what they received.

Before lunch was served we actually had a lot of time to interact with the clients who came early. This is always an eye opening experience because of the stories we hear. This is putting a face to the numbers we talk about, this is putting a face to poverty.

This is seeing Jesus!

We interacted with the clients for about an hour prior to serving lunch.

One individual I spoke to was a man named Spencer. He was an older gentleman who said he has seen it all. Yet, he was comfortable being where he was. He was a Korean War vet and was able to survive on his work pension and Social Security. He ran the whole gamut of problems in his life from drugs to alcohol abuse but he has been straight for a long time now and wants to keep it that way. He really was a cool guy. I enjoyed talking with him.

At the same table I spoke with Amos and David. Amos was relatively quiet as though he did not know where we were coming from. David on the other hand was quite talkative. He seemed a bit high but coherent. We talked about a lot of things from why he was there to Obama and the wars. He was a former drug abuse victim.

Many who frequent soup kitchens and use the shelters are there because of this problem.

I moved to another table. I encountered a fellow name of Daniel. He was setting up a chess game but was open to talking. He was interested in why we were there and appreciated what we were doing. His playing partner was not too impressed and would not even give me his name although he did at least bump fists with me. He could care less why we were there and appeared to be an angry individual. I pushed on this aspect a bit but all he said was "Dam right I am angry!" End of that conversation. I left them to their chess game.

I am sure some of the clients were or are resentful as to us being there but we have to experience this situation in order to share the stories to those we speak to. We become the voices for those who do not get the opportunity to speak out on their own behalf.

I realize that other BTC team members were also interacting with the clients at this time.

It would be nice if some of you could share your experience and add to this journal.

Restaurant style serving is so much more dignified than standing at a station and serving that way. This was much more respectful.

We served over 120 meals and even served seconds and thirds in some cases. The day before they served 135.

Lunch is served Monday thru Wednesday, plus dinners on Monday and Tuesday nights.  
Bob and Tom Sacerdote checked in the clients. Johnnie, Pam, Eric, John Ryan, Fr. Stephen and I served the meals.

We had arrived there at 9:45 and left at 1:30. Wow!

We had to be at Chris Murphy's office at 2:00.

We were greeted by Chris Murphy staffers, Sean Scanton, Director of Constituency, and newly hired Phil Gamble, former UCONN basketball player. Phil was hired specifically as a Poverty Advocate which we thought was exceptional. Someone specifically focused on poverty and poverty related causes. They mentioned that Chris Murphy had addressed 10 items on his agenda some of which were help for marginal children in poor neighborhoods, poor performing schools, closing the achievement gap, gun violence. They are also trying to support internships and mentoring programs among the poor and are working with mothers against violence as well as education rather than incarceration.

They encouraged us to continue what we are doing and to keep in touch. It was another positive visit for us. We left feeling good.

We then began our ride to East Hartford and St. Christopher parish. Although the ride over was uneventful, the skies began to look quite threatening. It was so hot and humid.

We would be presenting in the school gym without air-conditioning. Yikes!

This is Tom Breen's parish, he is the Deacon there, and he lead us over.

When we got there it looked as though this was going to be another night of pizza for our potluck.

However, a few parishioners showed up with food yet we sent support out for pizzas as well.

We shared our meal and began the presentation. So hot without the fans blowing.   
We could not keep them on during the presentation because you could not hear when they were running. So, we suffered through the heat and humidity. Just like people in poverty who have no relief. We could bear it for an hour and we asked those folks attending to do so as well.

We got through it in spite of a severe thunderstorm that knocked out the power for a short time. We got back up and running and finished our presentation but not a quickly as we had been averaging.

We did get 4 of the 6 who attended to write a letter though.

The fans were turned back on as soon as we finished the presentation. They did provide us with some relief.

Since the rain had stopped, Johnnie, Tom B, Pam, Eric, and I decided we would bike back to Holy Family. We turned on our flashers and proceeded cautiously. We got back before dusk but really just in time before dark. We showered and had a few good discussions before bed.

End of Day 4

Lou

**Day Five - Wednesday, 6/26 - West Hartford, Holy Family Retreat Center to Hartford to Simsbury, St. Mary's Parish**

We woke up early for 7:00 am mass. Fr. Pesce's homily this morning was perfect for our mission. He talked about how we have to make a commitment to follow Jesus. When we go in that direction, we might make mistakes, but we are still doing God's will. We can recommit and redirect our work.

After mass and breakfast the support folks again made sandwiches for later in the day. We discussed today's itinerary. We were to be at End Hunger CT at 11:00 am and we were attempting to connect with John Larson's office for a possible visit.

We gathered outside the Monastery entrance and left around 9:30.

Wendy made a call and we would visit Mercy House and St. Elizabeth House which is connected with Mercy.

Colleen would give us a tour when we got there. We didn't have a lot of time but we would fit it in.

We also we informed that Rachel form the Office of Catholic Social Justice got us a visit at the House of Bread which we had visited on last year's ride. We went from having hardly anything to fill the day to going all out to make each visit. We now had a fully packed day.

We called and changed the time for our visit to End Hunger CT. We would get there earlier so we could fit in our visit to House of Bread.

At End Hunger we were "educated" further about SNAP and we received information on a program they were promoting about Meals for kids for the Summer. They gave us handouts and business sized cards to pass out when we visited the soup kitchen. One side of the card was in English, he other in Spanish. Same with the handout document.

When we visited House of Bread it was packed. They are actually serving more now than last year. I handed out the cards inside while Dave handed them outside. This was so we were sure those who could take advantage of this program received them. All were so grateful. Meal for kids work well during the school year but usually there is no program during the summer when school is out. This filled a need. I left a pile of the cards with Matt the new proprietor of House of Bread.

We again engaged folks attending and heard their stories. I hope some of the other BTC team members could provide a story or two here.

Some of us met clients we met at MANNA the day before.

Dave had an interesting situation. He talked to a woman named Carol who he met at MANNA. She was a assistant CNA and out of a job. Her unemployment was going to run out within the next few weeks and she was desperate. Dave was moved by her story to the point he was taking steps to try and secure Carol some place of employment as a CNA.

Dave do I have this story correct?

And I know Karen was in the process of trying to get a women she spoke to set up with SNAP. Little pieces of meeting Jesus here.

Remember WWJD?

I have to comment on the incident here where that angry gentleman from MANNA who just wanted to play chess. We were cycling over to House of Bread and Pam and I were at the back of the group and we saw this guy walking on his way over to MANNA from the direction of House of Bread. We smiled and tried to give a welcoming "hello" but all this guy could do is curse at us. Sometimes it is difficult to see Jesus isn't it?

The experience of going to these soup kitchens affects us each year. this year it seemed Eric and Tom Sacerdote were touched the most. Eric couldn't even go into House of Bread this morning because he was still "feeling" the effects of our visit at MANNA the day before. It does "get to you" in ways you really don't realize until sometime after. so many people in tough situations. More each year. Why??

But for the grace of God that could be any one of us!! Yes, you or me!!

We left House of Bread to go over to Mercy House. We got a guided tour og the place from Colleen. she was great, kept us on task so we would not be late for Larson's visit. They are doing wonderful things at Mercy House and provide much to the community. We were very much educated further. Thank you Colleen.

We are thinking of possibly doing our Finale next year at Mercy House.

There was a nice writeup in the Catholic Transcript about Mercy House.

We left Mercy House and jogged across the street to John Larson's office. We met with our friend John Rossi. I still remember the first time we met with him years ago. He had not real interest or concern about our group. Now he is an enthusiastic follower.

He had two intern with him this visit. We had a great discussion and asked the interns if they and there friends had any ideas on the poverty situation in the US. They offered their concerns and commented on how the system had to be changed. They felt many of their friends shared their opinions. John Rossi was prepared as usual even given the short notice of our visit.

One thing he mentioned was that Medical bills are the leading cause of foreclosures.

He also told us that Members of Congress and their staffs have to pay for the Exchange and it is not cheap. They currently do not pay for health insurance.

They also see the need for campaign finance reform so that Congress reps could work for two years rather than campaign for much of that time.

The conversation was satisfying.

We left and decided to have some lunch before heading out again. Those sandwiches came in handy.

We then began our ride to St. Mary's in Simsbury.

Biking through Hartford is always a bit difficult with the traffic and construction and we even had to detour because of a shooting incident this time. This is extremely hard on the support team.

No real incidents on the ride over except for Tom Breen's chain. Deacon Art Miller met us in his car and escorted us to the church. Pretty cool.

He would do his Bible study prior to our presentation. we were wondering how this would all work considering the timing of both.

We got involved with his Bible study on Romans. It was to be there last session until the fall.

The theme of the bible study was how God loves us no matter what. Deacon Art worked that right into our presentation. He preached like an old gospel preacher and really energized the group. He cut his presentation short so we could get our thing going. Even still we had to hustle. Even under the pressure though we got through it fine. We did not do the letter writing but asked the group to do so at home Deacon Art said he would follow up on this with the group. There were about 50 in attendance. Found out through Sarah Hiller, from the Office, who contacted Deacon Art about meeting with him, that he has gotten some of these folks to already write their letters. Pretty impressive. Amen!

We had food, pizza, salads, desserts. We did not expect to be fed this evening because we thought the time did not allow for this. All worked out fine.

Even though we had to speed up our presentation, we hit all the important points. When asked by Deacon Art to end it I mentioned we had to get through the "Do we meet Jesus?" slide. He said okay. After I finished that slide and my story of Matthew, and, of course I got emotional again, he came over to me and whispered in my ear, "Lou, that was Jesus". He was moved by our presentation and shared that with the group.

It was a great evening. We left elated.

End of Day 5.

Lou

**Day Six - Thursday, 6/27 – The FINALE - Manchester, St. Bridget Parish to New Haven, the Office of Catholic Social Justice Ministry**

We planned on meeting at St. Bridget at 6:00 am. Joan and I arrived and found ourselves alone. I was concerned as we had a long ride to New Haven this morning.

John and Sue showed up next, a bit after 6:00.

While waiting for everyone else to arrive I pumped everyone's tires.

Johnnie, Pam, and Tom S had stayed at Bob and Kathy's but had a problem because of water pressure and could not really shower, etc. So, they were a bit later than planned.

They started this last day experiencing something those in poverty experience almost everyday.

We got Wayne back today and Jean Pierre joined us as well. Also, Lenora was going to ride with us.

We actually started our ride at 6:30. The route was very well planned. We did hit some hills earl and they forced Lenora to get off her bike. Tom B also had some problems with a tire and had to get off his bike as well.

After about 20 miles of the 46 mile total ride it began to rain and rain and rain. Some of us did not have rain gear with us so we had to gut it out.

We had to be extremely careful with the conditions. We continued on. Those in poverty do not have any option to get out of the rain. That compelled us to continue.

It was somewhat uncomfortable and even chilly at times.

The rain did, however, keep the heat away. As "bad" as it was, we all pretty much enjoyed the ride. We did have a few spills. Fr. Stephen as we crossed the bridge in Middletown and Jean Pierre as well. Luckily no one was injured physically, just their pride.

We arrived at the Office in plenty of time. They had lunch waiting for us.

I was a bit concerned about the Finale wondering if we would have any press other than Lenora and if people would show up. I was thinking our publicity may not have been what it should have been.

We are going to have to concentrate on this very much next year.

I was so disappointed because we had no press and no one really showed up.

The Mayor, John Destepano, and Bishop Peter were there to speak and greeted warmly.

Lynn Campbell, Director of the Office spoke about the Office's mission and welcomed us accordingly, thanking us for doing what we do and stopping at the Office for our Finale.

Just sad no one came to join in the celebration.

Lynn had a large check to present to a CCHD funded group, Environmental Justice, who brought a car load of folks to accept. That was the highlight of the event. They were very grateful for that support.

Although the Finale was somewhat of a letdown, we left bolstered by the overall success of the weeklong ride and that we would be better next year.

End of Day 6.

The next few days team members began to share their thoughts. Great to ride with everyone and we look forward to 2014.

Peace,

Lou