**Eric**

Thanks for the ride and time together this week. I just wanted to put some initial thoughts down. I plan to write some more detailed journal-like narratives of the individual days, but these are more "back of the napkin" observations of the week and ideas for what we might do more of or better in the coming year. (Please forward to Wayne if he doesn't get our emails and anyone else of interest). So please take these thoughts (esp. the suggestions/ideas category) in the spirit they are intended, that is, moving forward on our 2 feet)!

**What went well/Positives/Surprises**

* Meeting Sen. Blumenthal in his office. Was intended as a Monday morning meeting with his staff, but he was there, his plane to DC was delayed and he called us in and spent 15-20 impromptu minutes with us.
* Serving lunch at MANNA (Hands-on-Hartford) on Tuesday: Happy accident that another group cancelled and we served - literally, restaurant style - the guests their lunch
* Making the most of 3 straight days in Hartford. Visited 10 sites between Mon-Wed, including 4 legislative offices (Blumenthal, Murphy, Larson, Malloy/LOB), 2 lunches (MANNA and House of Bread) Mercy House Shelter, UCAN, End Hunger CT, and John F's former employment at the pre-school and daycare and meeting the children.
* Tying in with the Bible study group at St. Mary's Simsbury, we were able to present to about 50 people because of this
* The turnout at St. John Fisher, Marlborough, Sunday night. Small Parish, pastor was not there, but what I vibrant fellowship community of about 40 parishioners heard us.
* Letter Writing: Action step after the presentations. Excellent idea and great implementation for this year: were able to literally hand-deliver to legislators, tied the presentation together with a real, hands-on item that keeps us moving forward.
* Revised presentation: Most nights averaged 42-45 minutes, perfect length to keep attention but not lose the audience.
* Facebook: Our online presence is growing by the day. We actually have people following us during the week! Special thanks to Pam for being the FB administrator and posting our pictures and status'. Also, thanks to Wendy for her photo-journalism. I know Lenora was interviewing and snapping away this week, but Wendy's photos are extraordinary and I can't wait to see her collection.
* Hospitality at Holy Family Monastery: Thank you Fr. Terry as always for your invite.
* Great support, as always. This almost goes without saying, but the readiness with food, drink, shelter (in a van), a wave or encouragement, makes the seeing our SAG "wagons" a site for sore eyes. In addition, making our sandwiches at Holy Family, loading and then cleaning out their vehicles, and especially doing our laundry. So if I didn't say this, thank you to Sue, Joan, Wendy, Karen, Cathy, John Scavotto and Dave! Special thanks to Wendy for driving Laura home on Monday night, and to Dave for your encouragement and feedback on my speaking points each night during the presentation).
* Great turnout of riders. I personally was very happy to be able to do my first full week, we had a good "core" group, and was so good to see some "original" BTC members (Kelly, Charlie) and new members ride for at least a day (Lenora, Laura, Sarah Hillier). Great also to see Claire at several visits, even though she couldn't ride this week.
* Rain on the final day: Yes, I think this was a positive. Thankfully it was a warm-ish rain, but it was pouring at times and I think it added a dimension and a perspective to our pedaling that we would not otherwise have gotten had it been a sunny day. It helped that the sun came out and we dried out for the finale in New Haven.
* The fellowship with all of you as a group: the laughs, yes, the conflicts but mostly the shared experience.

**Suggestions/Disappointments/Ideas**

* No press at any event all week (except Lenora with the Catholic Transcript and a pre-ride article in the J.I.). But no visibility from the local TV news or Hartford, New London or New Haven newspapers that I saw.
* Cue-sheet mishaps. Lots of discussion around changes on the fly and critiques of the roots. (of which I am disappointed with myself for being part of).
* Post-ride regroups to share. Worked well in New London. But fell apart a bit with sidebar conversations at Holy Family.
* Turnouts for presentations in New London, Holy Family in Hebron, Holy Family Monastery and St. Chris. Single-digit audiences (besides ourselves) for most of these. Couple of thoughts on this:
* Consider a different approach to the "post-Mass" gathering, a meet and greet, short presentation and then P-E-D-A-L "stations" where groups of 2 or 3 stand at a station and discuss informally with parishioners who would like more information?
* Definitely consider next year sending 2-3 of us to each parish the week before our visit and asking pastor to let us make an announcement during the Mass that prior weekend.
* More of a game-plan for speaking points (and speakers) during legislative visits. I think it works well as is, but would not hurt to set a brief agenda (John will ask about the farm bill, Lou will ask about immigration, Johnny F will ask about the sequester, Bob will explain our mission, Pam will present the letters, etc.). Will make us look better prepared I think.
* Cannot place all of the contacts/reach-outs leading up to the weeklong on Lou. Lou does an amazing job, has contacts with CABHN and OCSJM, but I'm sure he could use some help, and as the hymn goes, "Let it begin with me."
* How do we do more events during the rest of the year? Take a regular once a month shift at MANNA serving lunch, or do a holiday? Ride there in good weather? More youth group/confirmation class presentations?
* Re-open the idea of writing a BTC "Mission Statement". I for one had a tough time narrowing down our focus when someone asked me what our overall goal was.
* Tie in with Holy Family to make BTC an offering for the break-out sessions during their Men's and Women's retreats?
* Tie in to Bible Study or other ministries in various parishes? These types of things have a built-in captive audience.
* Increase Meetings. Maybe keep September through February last Monday of the month. I would vote to increase to bi-weekly from March through June, knowing that not everyone can attend all meetings, maybe this would allow people to attend one of the meetings in the critical months leading to the weeklong. We could spend one meeting dedicated to current legislation, issues, for our own education, and one meeting dedicated to logistics for the week-long. Or, might be just as easy to put both overall topics on agenda for each meeting. The idea behind this is twofold: to get some traction on our mission, the current issues, and to allow us to meet more as a group. It occurred to me this week that we meet at most 9 times a year, and then throw ourselves together for 6 straight days full immersion.
* Define roles, make "committees" if we have to: Parish contacts, scheduling for the pre-week Mass speaking, committee on the presentation (obviously with Lou, John, etc), Cue-sheet assignments, Legislative contacts (Bob's bailiwick, but he might want assistance), Press and press releases for weeklong. While I think the last thing we need is to form committees (reminds me of what political commentator George Will once said in reply to his thoughts on professional football: It combines two of the worst things in our society: Committee meetings (the huddle) punctuated by violence), I do think this gives everyone an opportunity to be involved in something(s) that they have a vested interest in, and more importantly, should reduce the critiquing after the fact.

Well, it wasn't my intention to have more "suggestions" then "positives", but I combined some overall group ideas with my thoughts on this year's weeklong in my "suggestions" bullets. I look forward to any rebuttals or different ideas or opinions. These are just mine above, wanted to write to all of you before I forget them. More to come about the actual days of the weeklong. Thanks again all, see you soon.

Eric J.

**Johnnie F**

Eric, thank you for your comments. Now I know what you were thinking as you whizzed past me. Your thoughts are not just napkin stuff. They are well thought out. I see us needing to identify each member's strengths and capitalize on them. I am afraid to commit to some if the ideas that I think are valuable yet we are asking our audiences to do just that. I loved having everyone along for the ride no matter how many days they were available. Many thanks to the support folks. I believe that their job is harder that mine. I like the Idea of having some direct service activity that we can do together. I often think that that is what I do for a job. Is that just a cop out? I like your suggestion several of us take a topic to discuss with the reps we meet.

Johnnie F

**Pam**

I just want to thank you all for a wonderful week. As usual this journey with all of you changes my life. As I tell others this past week is really a retreat for me. It gives me an opportunity to reexamine my faith and my passion for advocating for the poor. I also learn about more about myself. As I say during the presentation, I can accomplish anything with all of you next to me. Thanks for being a part of my life.

I missed all of you today and hope you all have a nice weekend. I look forward to continuing this mission and journey with each of you. You make me a better person.

God Bless,

Pam

**Lou**

I just got home from the movies and read Pam's email.

I have been thinking about what Eric wrote and what Johnnie F added. I have reflected some on my own journey with you all but have been interrupted as Pam said by "life getting in the way". Got home from the ride, went to Noah's baseball game within hours of getting home, he slept over and was with us all day up to the end of the movie. So, I have had little time to reflect.

I have to say that I missed riding today. Driving the streets I kept thinking of us pedaling through Connecticut. When it rained today I remembered the feeling of biking in the rain, of sharing that with you, of the support folks still cheering us on, not asking us to get off our bikes and out of the rain. What a trip!

I feel blessed to be part of BTC and being community with you.

I apologize for my grumpiness at time, well maybe all the time, and snapping at anyone when things are questions about why we are going here or there, etc. I put a lot of effort into making the connections possible for us to do this. Sometimes it is frustrating when I feel things do not go as planned, or are easily changed or when people I think should be there are not. I want this event to continue and be more successful each year.

I wish more people attended our presentations. I wish more people attended our Finale. I wish some of you did a little more and I hope you consider that next time. But I have to admit I do like organizing the ride. It gives me pleasure when it all falls into place and we have our route. Could I use more help, of course. Should I try harder to delegate and trust, sure I should.

I love being with every one of you and I cannot see the last week in June go by without BTC and riding along with you, even for only a day.

Please continue in this mission. I cannot do it without you being part of it. We ride hard. We learn from each other. We share our experiences. We get closer as a community. We are BTC!

Whether I ride up front or am in the rear, I want to be riding along with you. Whether I speak in presentations, or engage clients in soup kitchens, I want to be there with you. Whether we agree or disagree on what's best, I want to do it with you. Eleven years I have been doing this. BTC has been such an influence on who I am. Do we see Jesus? You bet! I see Jesus in each one of you. WWJD? What you guys all do, that's what!

God bless. You know I will not stop sending or responding to these emails. So be prepared.

Right now I need sleep. Good night my friends an cycling disciples.

Lou

**Sue R**

I have never had so much energy after a BTC week-long than I have had this year and that is a blessing because I have never been as busy after a ride as I am . . . My daughter and her family are moving today.

Just an observation for now –

We are truly engaged in something bigger than ourselves. I felt the honest conversations we had on this ride have opened up a path to deeper involvement with our brothers and sisters. These conversations took place in soup kitchens - parish halls - in our vehicles - standing with the bikes in the hot sun - around tables at Holy Family and now this wonderful conversation through e-mail. I attribute the boost in energy I am experiencing to the life giving nature of being in relationship with all of you and your unwavering commitment to the mission.
I am looking forward to see where we go from here.

Peace and blessings,

Suzanne

**Bob**

Surprise, surprise – I also have some thoughts but they are going to come in spurts because I can’t remember them all at once. Here’s my start: it’s a lot of work to get our mission “moving” and we need to leverage the “strength’s and blessing’s” of each person to a much greater degree. I’m immediately very impressed with Laura’s expression of her time with us so I‘d like to ask her if she would put our mission statement into a brief and consumable form reflective of her own words that she posted on Facebook (Eric, can you ask her to do this? and it doesn’t mean she’ll be asked to do anything more) . By his self-expression, Lou loves the contact and logistics of the week-long event so let’s empower him to do it in the future and I will stop asking him if he needs help. But there’s much more to the ride than the routing, cue sheets and contacts at the parishes or communities. There’s all the poverty centers, political offices and media contacts to arrange and lots of other stuff related to ride support. We need other team members to take ownership of these “things”. I think the “ride support” stuff is so well done by Wendy, Suzanne, Kathy, Karen, Dave, John Scavatto and Joan that they can decide what, if anything, needs improvement. Great job again this year, Sag team!! The political office contact’s this year were great for the federal officials but weak again for the local politicians and I take responsibility for that. It’s time for a new strategy to make these folks accountable and I volunteer to take this on.

One item that I thought distinguished our ride this year was the Facebook communications we used and received and I think that made our ride more visible and our unstated mission more welcomed. I think more usage of social media will only help us but I think it needs more direction and focus. To do this, I think we need to recruit a savvy marketing communication person who is up to date on the usage of social media and contacts with area media outlet’s. It’s pretty clear from our experience this year that more of this communication helps us and our mission.

I love Claire’s observation about our “privilege’s” and the gift’s received from God to help those in poverty. Are we all ready to leverage them for the benefit of the poor?

I have more personal thoughts about the ride this year which will come later as they pop back into my diminishing brain.

Peace. Bob

**Lou again**

Two things from Bob's thoughts worth mentioning.

If it were not for Pam's continual posting on Facebook during the weeklong we would not have had the immediate growth in attention there. Pam deserves tremendous amount of credit for our increased Facebook exposure. If she would take that on I think we would be all the stronger for it.

Second, I am always looking for help in planning the weeklong, i.e phone calls to parishes, etc. I do not want anyone to get the impression I want to do it all. This past year if it were not for John Ryan, Wendy, and the CCHD intern, the details and last minute connections would not have happened because I could not get it all done myself.

I look forward to the involvement of more of you and focused assistant on different pieces of the mission is fine. I want very much to see that happen.

Peace,

Lou

Wendy

I've enjoyed reading all of your e-mails. I too had a wonderful moving and awe inspiring week. I truly am thankful to be a part of this team. I don't have time to write much right now but I wanted to get the pictures out to you.

Wendy

Lenora

Most of my weeklong thoughts are in the story that was posted on the Catholic Transcript website. Here's the link: <http://www.catholictranscript.org/home/local-news/2949-annual-act-of-faith-on-two-wheels-aims-to-eradicate-poverty.html>
A photo gallery may also be posted. Some of my reflections were edited from the story which may be published in the print edition for August.

It was fun for me to read the story, which I submitted a few weeks ago and served to remind me of what a pleasure it was to meet and ride with such a wonderful group of dedicated individuals. I am grateful for your hospitality and kindness during the ride.

The ride on Tuesday was a wonderful experience for me. I had never been to a soup kitchen and never knowingly spoke to a homeless person. I will long remember the stories and faces of people I met at Manna.

In addition to reflections in the Transcript story, I made a few observations and have some suggestions for enhancing the Powerpoint presentation and a few ideas for increasing awareness of your Brake the Cycle of Poverty group and it's mission. I'm pretty sure I'm a lot better at marketing and communications than I am at cycling.

Lenora