

BTC of Poverty 2008 Weeklong

Day 1 – Sunday, 6/22 – St. Bridget, Manchester to St. Mary’s, Putnam to Most Holy Trinity, Pomfret

We left St. Bridget at 6:30 am, pretty much on time. Lou started us off with a send-off prayer (The Road of Life) with a little emotion in his voice as he found it difficult to get the words out. A few others had a tear in their eye as well. “Pedal on”.

At this time, Charlie was biking over to the WFSB studio to be interviewed live with Jessica Scheider. He was going to catch up to us somewhere along the way.

The ride was uneventful for the most part except maybe for the hills, especially on Route 244. It was great to be back as a team, our bright colored jerseys reflecting in the sun and you could hear the voices of the riders, “Car back”. The road on the way to Putnam was narrow and had a small shoulder for a good portion. That small shoulder and some broken pavement cause Lou to hit the guardrail and get a little banged up with a trip to Day Kimball Hospital. Lou had started to speed up his ride to get to St. Mary’s on time to speak at the end of the 10:30 mass. Unfortunately he was not meant to speak there. He found the Holy Spirit had other plans for him. While being treated at the hospital he engaged in conversation about poverty and Healthcare issues in the part of the state with the nurse who bandaged him. He listened to her frustration and her comments about being part of the Working Poor in CT, living paycheck to paycheck. She mentioned how she had written to Governor Rell, a great Take Action step, and never received a response. The same with Lieberman. Lou was there to hear her story and add it to our experiences.

Guardrails are supposed to be there for protection and to keep us safe. But some guardrails are in disrepair and have been neglected and can actually wind up hurting people instead of helping them. So much like those folks in poverty. They hit the guardrail and crash and do not have the support Lou had or the healthcare Lou had. They cannot get up and ride the next day. They have to worry about surviving for the next day.

The riders made it to St. Mary’s in good time to hear part of the mass. Mike commented on how he like the way they did the Hosanna and the Our Father. Johnnie F spoke at mass and was perfect and very effective in the time he spoke although he misspelled PEDAL. Probably the parishioners will remember it better because of that. After mass the team engaged the parishioners at their coffee hour. Anne spoke to a parishioner who had been diagnosed with a severe illness in 2001 and as a result fell into poverty. She could not work for 10 months. She conveyed to Anne how “friends” sent her anonymous donations that came right in time for Christmas and tax season. Now this parishioner is helping others in similar situations get back on their feet. Anne asked what we can bring to our politicians and was told that it would be helpful for some kind of assistance program for those disabled to cover the time from when they are first disabled until coverage begins. In some cases there is a year’s gap. This parishioner spoke passionately with a lot of frustration and a bit of anger. She mentioned to Lou that the Governor has not been seen in this part of the state and that conditions are getting worse. We saw Jesus in this parishioner.

We left our bikes in the basement of St. Mary’s and drove over to our first poverty center, Daily Bread for 1:00. The weather was a little threatening so it was a good idea to not ride. We thought about Charlie possibly getting caught up in the rain and thunder.

At Daily Bread we were educated by Kathi Peterson, Community Resource Coordinator. She provided us with a lot of insight to the poverty situation in Putnam and the surrounding area. She mentioned a 40% increase in usage of the

Food Pantry. This would be a theme we would hear over and over this week.

After leaving the Daily Bread Food Pantry, we went to a Pizza place and had lunch together. We educated the waitress as to why we were there all in biking gear. She thought our cause was great. So do we.

After lunch we headed for Pomfret School where we would spend the night. The bikers, except Lou, rode the 5 miles to Pomfret School. We all set up our places in the gym and gladly took our showers.

We were greeted by Donna Lefevre who made sure we were all set. After getting settled and showered, we went over to Most Holy Trinity church for dinner with Fr. Ricky. Homemade ravioli, spinach and shrimp filled. Yummy!! And we had Polish bread and candies plus strawberry shortcake for dessert.

We presented to Fr. Ricky and one parishioner. Obviously not the crowd we wanted but who knows if that person didn't start something because they were touched by something they heard or saw in our presentation. Fr. Ricky invited us back and said he would ride with us next year. Wouldn't that be cool!

All in all a great first day.

Day 2 – Monday, 6/23 – Pomfret to St. Ann's, Avon

We started at around 6:15 am. Some of us had wanted to attend 7:00 mass at Most Holy Trinity but time was of the essence. The team biked over those same hills to Rockville where we would get a tour of the Tri-Town Shelter and meet up with the other part of the team coming from St. Bridget.

Right at the beginning the team hit their first hill, a good one. According to Dave it would be the toughest of the day. Don't think anyone riding believed that. Lou was doing support for this leg resting his injuries and 11 stitched in his finger. He cheered on the bikers as they came up those hills and encouraged them to hang in there. 30 miles to Rockville in damp wet conditions. What dedication to all those who rode and to the support folks who were right there as well doing what they do best. By the way, Pat we missed your supporting efforts.

The tour of Tri-Town Shelter and The Cornerstone were amazing. Although separate agencies, these two poverty centers are side by side and consist of a shelter, food pantry, community center. We were educated by several folks at the Tri-Town Shelter including Peter Nijssen, Executive Director and Julie Ryback, supervisor.

Tri-Town Shelter Services temporarily houses fifteen residents, either families or adults, and is staffed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Given their 15 bed capacity x 364 days in a fiscal year, they provide shelter for a total of 5,460 evenings. During the past year they have provided housing for 264 adults and 39 children, making 303 clients served. It provides temporary housing, compassionate care, competent case management, and the effective coordination of services resulting in personal growth and productivity. This facility offers semi-private and private rooms on two floors. The first floor houses the Shift Supervisor's office, common kitchen, men's lounge, bedrooms and bathrooms while the second floor houses the Executive Director's office, women's lounge, bedrooms and bathrooms, as well as a multi-purpose room which serves as a personal computer lab, learning lab, workforce readiness and retention classroom, and is the on-site location for our mentors to meet with their matches for acquiring the skills-set needed to succeed in today's world.

We also got a tour of The Cornerstone Foundation, Inc. by John Ryan and Helen Syriac. Cornerstone is a multi-faceted organization that provides assistance to the needy in the tri-town area of Vernon, Ellington, and Tolland. They are a soup kitchen providing two meals a day for the wider community, Monday through Friday and one on Saturday and Sunday. In addition, the soup kitchen provides a continental breakfast for the shelter guests. The clothing bank is opened Wednesday morning and Thursday afternoon anytime for emergencies. The Community Center offers

programs for children ages toddlers through teenage years. They also provide an overnight emergency shelter called "The Cornerstone shelter" for men and women who are in need. The Cornerstone is one of the agencies that Charlie donates to with his marathon runs for poverty awareness.

We were all impressed by the ever, ongoing rooms. The capacity seemed endless and their dreams to expand, although you wish there was no reason to expand, were encouraging because of the help they are bringing to those in need.

We had some lunch. Sandwiches the support group picked up for us while we were attending the tour of the complex. Kelly showed up with Braedon. Nice to see you Kelly. We missed you!

After lunch we had to split into two groups. One group would bike to Avon and the food pantry, Gifts of Love and the other would bike to Joe Lieberman's office in Hartford. The group that rode to Avon had to hustle to get to the Food Pantry in time. Lou joined this group as he felt the urge to ride injuries and all.

Bob informed us of the owner of a bike shop in Avon who saw Charlie on WFSB on Sunday who agreed to repair any of our bikes for free because he believed in our cause. We would all meet at that bike shop before going to St. Ann's.

The group that headed out for Gifts of Love diverted from the Cue sheet in order to meet our deadline to be at Gifts of Love by 3:00. This kind of thing frustrates those who do the Cue sheets but sometimes are unavoidable. They also had to get over Talcott Mountain. It was an enjoyable ride and just as they arrived it began to downpour. They got a bit wet but a minor inconvenience considering those in poverty probably had no way of getting out of the rain and have to deal with that everyday.

They were given a tour by Chris Napierski and saw a video that described what Gifts of Love provides to the community. Families helping Families. They serve the Working Poor. You must prove you have a job to visit Gifts of Love. They serve families who are facing a short-term crisis in their lives, the loss of a job, reduced working hours, divorce, death of a mate, domestic abuse and do not qualify for government support. They provide food on the table, a winter coat, or a bed to sleep in. The focus is to help the clients put their lives back together and regain their financial independence.

Chris mentioned that it was so important that children had a brand new backpack to start school so they were not singled out by other kids. They have a program to assure each child in their program has that brand new backpack.

Gifts of Love is committed to helping people struggling to help themselves.

The economy is playing havoc with helping Gifts of Love live their mission. They used to make two trips a month to Foodshare for supplies, now because of the cost of gas, they only make one trip. Their fuel bill is \$700 per month. And, they have already used double in expenses as compared to this time last year.

What a contrast in the Food Pantry in Avon versus a Food Pantry in Putnam. There is a lot of giving in Avon but the giving is at a different level. The dignity level for those in Avon seemed to be at a higher level. Sometimes those visiting the Food Pantry there actually knew some of the volunteers and to avoid embarrassment the staff had to pretend the visitor was a volunteer to protect their dignity. Plus the donations seem to be of higher standards or quality. Some clothes come in with price tags still on or are the more high priced labels, Nordstrom's, Talbot's, etc. Doug made the comment that if he was to be poor he wanted to be poor in Avon. The video we saw was very touching and the clients are so appreciative. If you weren't moved by the video something is wrong.

We got stuck there because of the rain but had to make a decision as to when to leave. Time was running short and Chris had to leave. We left in the rain and Chris helped Lou wrap his bandages in Gladwrap self-sticking plastic to keep dry. All the little things these folks do to help their neighbor.

The other group met at Lieberman's office in downtown Hartford. His representatives were looking for specific questions from people we have met and asked how his office could help. They recommended we speak with DSS for specific advocacy groups to help those in poverty. Rumor has it that John Ryan got a little emotional while in their office. Don't know the details but could imagine his questions.

The first group got to the Avon bike shop and Dave Newman, Assistant Manager, began working on Lou's bike. When the others arrived, Pam, Mike, and John had their bikes adjusted in some way. Dave was an amazing guy and we had our picture taken with him and will send to him so he can post on his website.

We left the bike shop on our bikes in plenty of time to arrive at St. Ann's for dinner. Mary Lou Connor greeted us and we had a great meal. The food was fantastic and we had a crowd of 18 who joined our presentation. Very good group and interactive.

We left St. Ann's and headed to Holy Family for the night. We were greeted there by Fr. Terry and after showering we had a little reception on the third floor. A nice way to end the second day.

Day 3 – Tuesday, 6/24 – Holy Family to Foodshare, Bloomfield to Loaves and Fishes, Hartford to either Dodd's and Larson's or My Sister's Place and Catholic Workers House

We all attended at 7:00 mass with Fr. John. His homily stressed that we had to change our way of thinking. Exactly what we are trying to get others to do as well as ourselves. After mass we had a wonderful breakfast to get us going. We left Holy Family around 8:30 to be at Foodshare by 10:00 am. Noah, Lou's grandson, joined us on this portion of the tour. He cheered on his Grandpa.

Foodshare was quite impressive. They serve 30 towns and 300 agencies, 6000 families. They have seen a 147% increase in usage. We were greeted by John Philip Sardi who is the newest member of Foodshare. He commented how he thought we misspelled "break" but then put two and two together. He introduced us to Mike Hicks, Communication Director who was our tour guide. He thought we were "Harley Guys". We first viewed a video about Foodshare and the agencies they serve. Many of us were brought to tears. Shoprite produced the video called "Think about Hunger Next Door". The message, "fall behind hard to catch up".

There has been a volunteer cutback at Foodshare due to the rising fuel prices.

Foodshare gets its supplies as follows: 79 – 82% from food industry; 15-19% from government; 3-4% from food drives; 1-2% purchased. They deliver 34-38% to Food Pantries; 30-39% to mobile foodshare sites; 10-13% community kitchens; 3-4% emergency shelters; 14-15% other.

There are 100,000 individuals at risk in CT with 40,000 children. 25% rely on emergency feeding programs.

We would shortly be on our way to Loaves and Fishes which is a client of Foodshare. We would share lunch at Loaves and Fishes with the clients.

The ride to Loaves and Fishes was great because we rode through the city. Lou told a woman waiting for a bus what we were doing and she just said "thank you". So many people appreciate what we are doing but there is so much more to do.

"Eating at Loaves and Fishes put a realistic approach to the importance and how appreciative the clients were". Pam shared her experience there. This young man walked into the soup kitchen towards the end. He had a smile that lit up the room. On my way by him, I stopped and told him my observation. He told me that I made his day. He says he tries to be positive and God works in mysterious ways. He said if he did not think this way he would be dead. I will never forget this man's smile."

After leaving Loaves and Fishes half the group went to Dodd's and Larson's while the other went to My Sisters Place. This group had some difficulty finding the new location for My Sisters Place but once we did we received a wonderful tour of the facility from Celia Tvrdik, Volunteer & Donations Coordinator, which included some transitional housing as well as food pantry. Their theme: Empowering homeless women and their children to achieve independent living. Reasons for taking advantage of this center are: domestic violence; eviction; or mental illness. They suddenly find themselves without a home, or at risk of being homeless and forced into the streets. Clients must be willing to set goals,

participate in education or job training, and be motivated to improve their quality of life as well as contribute to the community.

My Sisters Place is a 24 hour shelter with meals, laundry facilities, and case management. A 21 day stay with possibility of extension. A 16 bed facility. For Transitional Housing, 6 to 24 month stay including life skills, education, empowerment and support groups. 18 furnished apartments. This was a secure facility in a rough neighborhood.

After leaving My Sisters Place, we headed for Catholic Workers House which was right close by and had a nice discussion with Brian Cavanaugh about what they do there. What a great place and opportunity for kids to get them going in the right direction. This day there were no children there but we still got a good feeling of what transpires there. After our discussion Patty Moran left us. From everything we saw Patty had a great experience.

Those over at Dodd's office got to meet with the same representative from past year's. Nothing new but at least at Larson's office they were a little more prepared for us and even said that we are the only group they keep coming back. And they know we will be back again next year.

More reflections from Pam. "Our visits to the political leaders were much of the same, but they need to know this is a subject that needs to be talked about. In the discussion in Senator Dodd's office it was mentioned that he had to try for six years to get a bill passed that helped people living in poverty. I was totally taken aback. If he is willing to persevere that much in something he believes in, so can we.

John Rossi in Congressman Larson's office passed on some vital information of what has been done in the future and what will be worked on in the future. He really understands our cause and is still talking about getting John Larson to Manchester to talk about some of these issues. Charlie does a great job facilitating these meetings and pushing for a Poverty Summit.

Another stop we made after Congressman Larson's office was End Hunger. We met with the executive director Lucy Nolan. She educated us on their agency [HYPERLINK "http://www.endhungerct.org" \t "_blank"](http://www.endhungerct.org) www.endhungerct.org. Another agency working to try to Brake the Cycle of Poverty."

We all made our way back to Holy Family. Those from Catholic Workers rode back. On this ride Lou talked to two women who were giving us a thumbs up. He asked if they knew what we were about and one replied that they did because they knew us from last year. They were from St. Bridget of Kildare.

We all arrived back at Holy Family and showered and got ready for supper. What a great meal!

We then prepared for our presentation at Holy Family and there were quite a few impressive people in attendance. Jim Vicevich was one of them and invited us on his radio show. Also included were Michael Tomasso (and his son Adam) who attended Mass on Tuesday morning and responded to the personal appeal from Fr. Terry. Michael brought Peter Barr who operates the Bicycle Recycle Shop in New Britain which helps underprivileged kids to learn the repair skill. One of the woman who attended is involved in lobbying for the poor, Sister Mary Alice Synkewecz, RSM - They are from Collaborative Center for Justice Inc. [HYPERLINK "http://www.ccfj.org" \t "_blank"](http://www.ccfj.org) www.ccfj.org.

All these folks were asked to introduce themselves and provided information that could have been our presentation for all intents and purposes. Fr. John actually pulled statistics off the internet and spoke to them. We all found this rewarding and enlightening. We all thought the presentations was one of the best especially with the audience.

Pam mentioned that she felt the electricity of the group on the 3rd floor that night. She felt we were all awakened by our presentation and that the Holy Spirit was present tonight. I couldn't agree more!!

We relaxed and got ready for our next ride tomorrow.

Day 4 –Wednesday, 6/25 – Holy Family, West Hartford to St. John the Evangelist parish, Watertown

We started the day with mass at 7:00 am with Fr. John. Great beginning to a new day. Breakfast followed and we were fortified for the day's ride. We planned on leaving Holy Family at 10:30. So, since we had some time, Johnnie F and Lou headed to Hartford for a short ride. They went to the Daycare Center at St. Francis Hospital where Johnnie worked at one time. 10 mile round trip ride. Ride was great. Kids were wonderful! They were all excited about us being there and liked that we had our bikes. We had the kids sit on our bikes and try on our helmets and sunglasses. They were so adorable. Four and five year olds. They asked us when we were coming back. Would be a nice thing to do as a group.

Anne took the extra time to do a short run.

Ten of us rode off setting our course for Watertown. We were all so appreciative of Fr. Terry and his hospitality. We took a picture with him just before we left.

We stopped for lunch in Plainville prior to going to the Plainville Food Pantry. Nice relaxing lunch with the sandwiches made loving by our support folks with the goodies from Holy Family. Mark was a great shuttler to the rest rooms. We went to the Food Pantry and had a great visit and tour. We had been there on last year's ride and the main thing that has changed is that there is a greater usage of the food pantry and now some of those who donated partake. This seemed to be an ongoing theme this year.

The ride to Watertown was hilly like most parts of Connecticut. Some very big hills. Had one huge downhill before we stopped for ice cream at Jillie's. Kind of scary coming down. We were advised of a long up hill climb that we would experience shortly after leaving Jillie's. This was true, a 2 mile gradual uphill climb. During that climb we saw we were being filmed by the Crossroads folks as we climbed. They followed us to St. John's where they conducted interviews with several of us. Even Kathy King got interviewed. Nice finish to the ride. They had called Lou earlier and asked about our route. We didn't expect to see them until we were at the church so this was a nice surprise. As we climbed that hill we had to remember what Bishop Rosazza told us on our first Connecticut ride, think of the poor struggling everyday with every pedal stroke going up those hills.

We had a nice supper hosted by Nora Myers, the parish secretary, and Fr, John Cooney and Fr. James George. Dessert would follow our presentation so we hoped that would attract some more people. We actually had a good number of people attend. Our presentation was done in the church and went quite well. Fr. Cooney asked us all to say something about ourselves so that actually added to the time we spoke. We did not want to run too long since dessert time was to be afterward. After dessert we packed up the bikes and headed for Fairfield University where we would spend the night,

Slowly but surely we got there, picked up our keys at the Public Safety Office, and found the dormitory we would be staying in. Joan wasn't feeling all the good and had a tough evening. Chills all night but she got up early to leave to

go home to babysit Noah and she expected to return the next morning with Charlie. That didn't happen.

Since we arrived so late at Fairfield University and we couldn't get to the laundry facilities, we all had to wash out our biking clothes in the shower. Well, they never dried overnight and Pam thought she might have to bike the next day in her jammies.

All in all another great day.

Day 5 –Thursday, 6/26 –Fairfield University to Operation Hope, Fairfield to New Covenant House of Hospitality, Stamford to St. Pius X parish, Fairfield.

We awoke to wet biking clothes. Some used hair dryers to dry their clothes, some had a second jersey and shorts, other waited until the clothes were dried using the laundry, including Pam. She didn't want to ride in her jammies after all. We had a breakfast of Dunkin Donuts coffee and donuts. The coffee was perfect. Thanks for those who went early to get it.

We biked over to Operation Hope in Fairfield, and talked with Carla Miklos, Executive Director. She was wonderful and full of energy and so willing to share everything about what they do.

Operation Hope provides a variety of helpful services to people who are homeless and at-risk of homelessness. A majority of program participants first contact Operation Hope when they are in need of assistance with housing or shelter and food. Often, they are already homeless. The Shelter and Food programs offer emergency assistance. They operate an 18-bed shelter for men, a 5-bed Shelter for women and a 2-unit Shelter for Families, a Community Kitchen that every day serves free hot nutritious meals to 45 individuals, and a Food Pantry. The Food Pantry is serving record numbers of families and individuals. An average of 120 households use the Pantry each month. For many, the Pantry is a vital resource in their daily challenge to make ends meet. Their goal is to assist families in meeting their basic food needs, and also to help them with other resources which may eliminate their food insecurity.

Operation Hope also works to provide Affordable Housing for low-income individuals and families. They own and operate 21 units of rental housing and offer comprehensive support service to empower residents to reach their goals of emotional and housing stability. In order to be a part of the affordable housing solution, Operation Hope has, through its subsidiary Micah Housing, committed to the acquisition, rehabilitation and operation of affordable permanent rental housing with off-site supportive services. The Affordable Housing program, AHP, includes scattered-site properties located in Fairfield and Bridgeport. They are primarily multi-family homes where formerly homeless individuals and families reside. Annually, more than 12 single adults and 8 families call our AHP "home."

We got to ride through one of the Affordable Housing sites while on our way to Stamford. The housing was quite beautiful and was in an established neighborhood with a ball field right next door for the kids to play.

As we biked our way to Stamford we ventured through the various affluent towns along the way, Westport, Darien, and rode along the water where there were all these gated homes with plush lawns and workers doing gardening, etc. Quite a contrast to where we were going. While biking through Norwalk we went through some of the not so nice looking neighborhoods and you could feel the eyes of those we passed wondering why we were there. The "haves" and the "have nots" were evident all during this ride. The "We s" and the "Us s" when there really is only Us.

When we got to New Covenant they were in the middle of their serving of lunch. We began to intermingle with the "guests". I met Mike and Larry as I entered and asked them how they were doing. Larry was just leaving and said, "Poverty sucks" and I asked him to tell me about it. He said he had a minimum wage paying job and could not make ends meet. Plus he was only getting part time work. He thought we were doing a good thing and hoped we could make something happened to improve conditions there is Stamford. Mike I think just needed someone to

talk to and clinged to me the whole time we were there. He was a construction worker and only had a job here and there and could not get a fulltime job. He complained about the hiring of the less experienced and that he was skilled but no one wanted his experience. Plus he needed medical care and had a lot of bills. You could here his despair in his voice and see it in his body mannerisms.

We had a nice discussion with the person who runs the Soup Kitchen. This poverty center gets funding from many sources. They even have a Medical facility there with volunteer doctors providing healthcare. As we have continuously heard, the numbers increase and it will get worse.

Mike shared his experience. His words:

“I wanted to comment that the number of clients using the soup kitchen and food pantry in Stamford was enormous. This really had an impact on me. I remember riding in, parking my bike and looking around at all the people. I thought to myself I wish I had my camera, the images I saw told the story of how many and who lives in poverty. I will never forget this.

Also I spoke to a man named John while I was having lunch and I remember him giving me the best advice. He said that no matter what happens you've got to take good care of yourself. He was in his sixties and he didn't look it. He actually looked younger.

He had to be following his own advice. I remember thinking, where did he come from? I'm here to help him but he actually helped me. I found this amazing.

Also, while we were there Jeanette and I over heard you, Lou, talking to a gentleman who mentioned the Appalachian Trail. Jeanette said "Jesus is up there telling people what to say." (Mike, I remember this man and he showed me his backpack too. He said he would really love to hike the trail)

We left Stamford and about 15 minutes into our ride we rode past someone I heard him cry out "Don't stop, don't stop." I remember thinking he has no idea the implications of his statement. (I don't think he knew why we were riding)

Then I remembered what Jeanette said at the soup kitchen. “
Mike

We headed back to Fairfield by the same route. We stopped at another poverty center, the Shelter for the Homeless but did not stay as our contact did not show up.

The ride back was similar to the ride out. We got back in time to shower and get to St. Pius X first for a delicious pasta meal and then we did our presentation to another good number of attendees (20). We had some young girls in attendance that we just so anxious to answer our questions and impressed us so much. They apparently liked the PEDAL concept. One of them was our official timer. The 53 minute fact always hits home. Our presentation lasted 57 minutes and was quite engaging. Fr. Bob spoke at the end of our presentation and thanked us and finished with the comment that it was Jesus referring to Lou's Matthew story. Great way to end.

Lou had to leave and go home to take care of Joan who needed care and left with the Ryans who were beginning their vacation. He found it hard to leave the group but knew it was the right thing to do. Sue and Kathy had returned to Fairfield U and picked up all of Lou's belongings so there was no need to go back. What good, efficient planning. The three of us headed back to Manchester after a lot of hugs and kisses.

Day 6 –Thursday, 6/26 –Fairfield University to St. Vincent De Paul Shelter, Waterbury

The biking for that day was definitely challenging! We started in Fairfield (with some trepidation and questions if we were still on Route 1 at times...thank God for our support crew to lead us in the right directions!) and consistently made our way north through the Valley and lo and behold, we hit some hills. The new motto for those who cue (hopefully I get this right): "If you cue it, you do it." Gotta love the back roads named "Chestnut Tree HILL" and "Andrew MOUNTAIN Rd." What I remember best is Charlie singing Christmas Carols up the hill, while telling us to keep

smiling, and then riding down again to get the rest of us up the hill. And of course Johnny F had to give me a hard time when I yelled out "hole" while ascending these hills! Love ya Johnny!!

After regrouping at the top of Andrew Mountain Rd, Dave called Fred to let him know where and how we were doing. I think he got a kick out of it!! Bob and Pam decided to hop on the bikes for the rest of our ride. They sacrificed riding for driving support (as well as Jeannette), which is a gazillion times harder than riding! So thank you for making the sacrifice...that is love. We finished out the ride into Waterbury and arrived at the St. Vincent De Paul Shelter finding police escorts (they were expecting the Bishop; we were grateful but knew they were not necessary). After hooking up with the OUA interns and Crossroads Magazine, we were led inside for a tour of the largest shelter in CT, making home to 126 beds.

The Shelter provides men, women and families with a secure sleeping environment seven nights a week. The facility is open to families on a 24 hour basis. Guests staying at the Shelter receive a shower, breakfast and supper, clothing vouchers to the Saint Vincent DePaul Thrift Store and lunch at the Saint Vincent DePaul Soup Kitchen. Five full time case workers assist the guests with employment and apartment searches.

The Shelter was crude, seeing where people are herded in via ramp, then their belongings are put into one crate and the men are sent downstairs into a communal shower. If there is overflow of men vs. women, they are given beds upstairs on the women's floor (which can present a whole other slew of problems). There is a separate women's and men's kitchen, and some college kids had come in the previous week to paint the women's floor (they did a great job). There is too great a need for this shelter and not enough room nor volunteers.

I was really moved (not in a warm, fuzzy kind of way) by the St. Vincent de Paul Shelter in Waterbury. It was crude, raw and my version of a concentration camp of sorts. When we were there, we saw some children near the cafeteria (if you want to call it that) and one of them was crying. I'm not sure what he was crying about (knowing kids it could be just about anything!) but it tore at my heart. To think that children grow up in shelters broke my heart. That shouldn't happen. That sound really struck me deeply.

After our tour provided by Paul Iadorola, Executive Director, we regrouped and headed to Nardelli's for some homemade yummy grinders/subs. Afterwards we made our way back to Manchester (thank goodness by car) and were greeted by Lou and Joan with John Philip Sousa playing in the background. We missed them both terribly earlier that day and it would not have been the same without them there at the end.

After our cleaning out, we joined up in prayer, led by Lou, thankful for the Holy Spirit working through us and in us and reaffirming our mission throughout the year. Each of us headed back to our families, knowing that the days/weeks ahead would be a time of readjustment into the "real world" just like the Apostles. It's the everyday work that Christ loves in us. That is the sacrifice of love...to love Christ right where He places us.

Anne

It was hard not riding the last day. Joan and I often thought of everyone riding or who would be supporting knowing there was some additional need for support. I called Johnnie F a couple of times and had a couple of conversations with Pam and Bob just to keep in touch with you guys. I knew the hills would be tough but I also knew your determination and will. God bless you all. We were glad we could be there and had hoped to beat you to St. Bridget. It was great to be with you at the end of a great week. The Spirit was with us and has a lot more in store for us. Hang on because we have a long ride ahead of us and God willing we will be there together continuously moving forward. Pedal On my friends!!!

Lou

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