

**Day Three - Monday, 6/23 – Holy Family Retreat House, West Hartford to St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen, Middletown to Senator Dick Blumenthal’s Office, Hartford to St. Elizabeth Seton, Rocky Hill**

We woke and went to 7:00 am mass with Fr. John Baptist Pesce. As always his mass and homily sends us on the road with thoughts of his words. “Live the Eucharist”. I think we try to do that every day of the ride and should do it every day of our lives.

After mass we enjoy our breakfast at Holy Family. I thank Fr. Terry again in my mind and heart for his graciousness and hospitality. I missed him being there this year but his spirit was there with us. Our support folks made lunch sandwiches just in case even though we would have lunch at the St. Vincent de paul Soup Kitchen later in the day.

We left only a couple of minutes after our scheduled 9:00 am departure time. We have been pretty good starting out each morning. The ride to Middletown was quite nice after all those hills in Litchfield, Torrington, Cornwall, etc. etc. etc. What a welcomed relief. We hit some hills but they were mere bumps compared to yesterday. No incidents along the way.

We arrived at the Soup Kitchen a bit later than our appointed time but not really late.

Claire stopped to talk to her relative who own a auto garage in Middletown. Outside the soup kitchen we engaged man of the clients who were milling around waiting to get their lunch or just leaving after eating. It was a bit different than we have done before.

I interacted with a woman named Maria. She told me her story of woe. She was on the State Rental Rebate program and was receiving $700 from the state for her rent. She lived in a dingy, very small apartment above a bar in town. I got the essence of alcohol on her breath. She continued to tell me her problem. And she showed me a letter she received from the state that she had received too much money and that they would be reducing her rent subsidy from $700 to $0 and that she had one month left. She started crying and all I could do was give her a hug. I told her to talk to the people here at the Soup Kitchen since they also are involved with Supportive and Transitional Housing and have a Community Assistance Program which helps people meet immediate and long term needs. She said she has been working with her case manager but it was not working out. She cried some more saying she had less than a month before she would be out of her place. She also said her landlord had been trying to get her out because he wanted to raise the rent a few hundred dollars more. He was doing everything to evict her. I had to hug her again.

Said goodbye as Lydia Brewster, the Soup Kitchen Director, was going to begin educating us about what St. Vincent de Paul does here in Middletown. Their motto “Meeting Needs, Offering Hope”.

They were founded by the Sister of Mercy in 1980. The Soup Kitchen serves over 200 meals a day. They also have the Amazing Grace Food Pantry where families are provided groceries once every 30 days. They have trouble keeping it stocked in the summer because people go away on vacation and “forget” about the poor for a while. And they shelter only the most vulnerable which means they have to decide who they should turn away. I would find that so very hard to do. I began getting this sad feeling like I hadn’t gotten before.

It was getting to me.

We were invited to go in and serve as well as interact with the clients. Some of the clients I talked to, Brian, Joe-Joe, Whitey, Bobbie V, Scott were homeless or are homeless. I asked them what they do during the day. Some said they look for work, some said they just walk around Middletown with nothing to do but try to stay out of trouble. Some said they hadn’t showered in 6 weeks. Yikes! I felt helpless, frustrated. Whitey was working as a roofer and had a place to live. He offers his place for his friends to shower and felt bad because he cannot take any of them in to live with him. A legal thing. Some of these guys just want to be alone. They are so down, beaten by the system, all hope lost. They say people look down on them, avoid them, look the other way. I shook their hands, we exchange names. And when they “had” to leave they thanked me for what we are doing and again reached out to shake hands. What more could I do. So sad, very sad. It was one of my more depressing days doing what we do.

I enjoyed my stint serving but knew I had to interact. It’s what we are supposed to do. You all know it is hard especially when you are talking to someone who is a bit out if it.

Finally the time came for us to get back on our bikes to head to Hartford. Ron Krum, Executive Director rode with us to Hartford but his ride was interrupted with some bike problem, more than a flat. Wendy got him to a bike shop for repairs. He met us in Hartford. We hit some pretty good hills going to Hartford and kept wondering if Claire really did this Cue sheet with Tom. She must have been distracted at the time.

We arrived shortly within our designated time for Blumenthal’s visit. He was not there but we talked to his staffer, Richard Kehoe. Rich had arranged last year’s visit although we did not speak with him last year. We actually got to talk to dick himself.

This year was a bit different. Rich Kehoe was attentive but didn’t take notes. We tried out our new template that Tom Sacerdote had prepped us for the night before at Holy Family. We would have five “asks”, one for each issue we were advocating for on tis year’s ride. Immigration Reform, SNAP renewal of previous reductions, Unemployment Insurance renewal for the long term unemployed, Tax Reform, and Minimum Wage.

The template worked fine and we were pleased and satisfied. We were a bit disappointed with Rich Kehoe though. We will se if anything comes of our visit.

So, now we head for St. Elizabeth Seton parish in Rocky Hill. This part of the ride went well as well. No big hills, nice country roads. Tom and Claire did a good job with this portion of the Cue Sheet. We actually cycled by my grandson, Noah’s, house where he now lives and one of our good friends home in Old Wethersfield who shouted “hello Louie” as we rode by, Joan on the phone with her as I passed.

Got to St. Elizabeth without a problem. We let Claire lead us in. We parked our bikes, were greeted by Pastoral Associate, Eileen Bransfield and Fr. Stuart and began entering the church. Food was being delivered for the potluck, people were milling around getting tings set up. John Ryan set up for our presentation. I was anxiously looking for Logan Singerman from Hands on Hartford as he was bringing a speaker from their Faces of Homelessness program to assist us in our presentation. They did arrive within a few minutes. Also a good friend of mine form when I worked at Aetna came to hear our message again (she was at our presentation at St. James in Rocky Hill a couple of ears ago). We had a nice visit. Her daughter made cupcakes in BTC colors.

Our presentation began as usual. Bob started us off as always with our story of BTC. The sun began to hit the screen in way you could not see what was there but we plowed through it. When we got to the part where we ask “what does a poor person look like?”, I introduced Logan who spoke a little about the Hands on Hartford program and particularly the Faces of Homelessness.

He introduced Aldene, a formerly homeless man who got up and shared his experiences about being homeless in CT. He was a bit awkward and admittedly he was impressed with our action, riding and advocating for poverty awareness. He was pleased that we were acting on this and that for the most part no one really puts things in action. He said he didn’t bring his “a” game but said enough to touch people in attendance. Though it was a bit confusing about hi particular homelessness, *did he actually choose to be homeless?*, he wanted to help other who were homeless so he had to live and know what it felt like to be homeless. I found out later that he had some family tragedies that kind of drove him to making this decision. He had a $700 a month income that he used to help other homeless try to get back on their feet. $700 does not go far in doing that. He said he was instrumental in getting the Homeless Bill of Rights written and made law although many do not know anything about this law. I found out later (at our Finale) that Aldene lived at Mercy House in a Transitional apartment but only had three weeks left before he had to leave and go elsewhere. He did not know where his next home would be. How do you live like that?

All in all our presentation was again well attended, probably 30 to 35 folks and State Representative Paul Doyle was there thanks to Bob’s persistence and Paul was asked to say a few words at the end of our presentation. It topped of the evening. He was short and to the point. Good job everyone.

So we mounted our bikes on the vehicles and headed to Holy Family where we would again shower up, meet and relax and debrief. Everyone or mostly everyone came up with their word and the process was again successful. What a great group. I know everyone was tired from a long day but you all came through and were there. Thank you.

Our cycling clothes were there to pick up after being laundered and we were off to bed and hopefully to a good night’s rest. Tomorrow we would be cycling to Bristol after a stop in Hartford and Chris Murphy’s office.

Lou