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**2016 Day Five - Wednesday, 6/29 – St. Thomas Parish, Southington to St. George’s Parish, Guilford**

We all had a pretty good night. We would be going to mass this morning with Gary’s son, Matthew presiding. Matthew was newly ordained and I think most of us were looking forward to this morning’s mass.

Then after mass we would have breakfast and then depart for Guilford.

Today, Bob and Kathy King would be arriving along with Eric.

The mass was in the chapel and Matthew celebrated with
Anthony assisting.

It was beautiful. And the day’s gospel was from Matthew as well.

Could not have started the day better.

After mass we went to our breakfast and there was so much food including some “treats” made by the nuns, biscotti and almond treats. At breakfast Anthony mentioned he might like to ride with us. We all enjoyed each others company.

It was getting close to the time to leave as we had to be at Connecticut Food Bank in Wallingford by 11:30.

Pam was getting nervous as she did this day’s Cue Sheet.

I said goodbye to Anthony and Fr. Matthew and expressed my delight that they both are the future of our church, and that it was in good hands. They were much appreciative.

We gathered around and Fr. Matthew led us in prayers before we departed. We said goodbye to Gary as well. We will miss him these last two days.

As we followed Pam’s Cue sheet we hit a few hills that she kept apologizing for. We told her to stop that we all knew how difficult it is to do a Cue Sheet.

We ventured forward and eventually got to the Connecticut Food Bank. When we arrived I asked if they could use the SNAP cards and information flyers as well as any of the Free Summer Meals cards we obtained from End Hunger CT. They took all the SNAP stuff but did not need the Free Summer Meal cards. We also dropped off some food donated by the nuns from St. Thomas.

We were met by Michael Davidow, Corporate Development Manager, who gave us a quick summary of what they do and brought us to their conference room for a brief presentation. There we also met Courtney Marello from Americorps and she and Michael co-presented. She was also connected with Hands on Hartford and had just gone through their Summer Blitz Free Summer Meals program in New Haven.

CT Food Bank is part of Feeding America. Check out the Feeding America website because they do amazing stuff. We also commented on the colors on their website and that of Feeding America, a similar orange and green.

**The mission of the Connecticut Food Bank is to provide nutritious food to people in need.**They do this by supplying food products and resources to their member agencies, as well as through direct food distribution programs and by promoting public awareness about the problem of hunger.

They provide food and resources to a network of community-based food programs, such as soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters, residential programs and day programs serving adults and children in six of Connecticut’s eight counties: Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London and Windham. The Connecticut Food Bank is the largest centralized source of emergency food in Connecticut and last year distributed enough food to provide more than 19.2 million meals. Their services cover ¾ of CT, similar to Foodshare covering the rest of the state, Hartford and Tolland counties. They advised us that 49.1 million people are food insecure which means inconsistent access to an adequate amount of food for an active and healthy life. Over 140,500 children statewide are food insecure.

We were impressed with the programs they offer such as the

*Kids' Backpack Program*- Weekend meals to school age children. The letter they showed us from kids calling this program "their survival bag"!

*Mobile Food Pantry*- Operates 33 mobile pantries sites-Each site serving an average of 120-325 households-Distributes over 1.8 million pounds of dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain goods and other perishable items.

*GROW* *(Grocery on Wheels) Truck*- The truck serves as a healthy food pantry on wheels for low income households with children enrolled in early childhood, preschool daycare, Head Start, and elementary schools. Families taking part attending workshops on nutrition, healthy eating and menu planning.

Also Low Income Senior Citizens are provided additional food once a month. Each month they receive a box consisting of staple foods such as pasta, cereal, canned fruits, vegetables and meats.

One thing to remember is that food is important but every dollar you donate to Connecticut Food Bank can purchase 2 meals.

Their presentation reminded us of our own presentation as we recognized the words “Educate”, “Donate”, “Advocate”. While Bob thought that Michael did not get what we were saying about advocacy, I thought that they would like to do more where and when they can. They are primarily into direct service and are extremely busy in that regard with little time it seems to me for advocacy. John’s recollection is that they, perhaps not being as strong on advocacy as they would like, expressed a desire to connect with us during the year – maybe to encourage people on their mailing list to advocate for some positions we would suggest. I think that would be a good development for them and for us. They also had stories for us to hear. One had to do with an individual who had lost his job and kept showing up at their mobile food pantry each and everywhere it appeared. This went on for quite a long time as he “had to feed his family of four kids”. And then one time he showed up with ice cream to celebrate the fact he had a job and would no longer be coming to the Mobile Food Pantry. Michael said that he was touched by the story and sometimes gets emotional when he tells it. Somehow my story about Jesus came up and both he and Courtney wanted to hear it. I told them just before we were about to leave. We enjoyed their talk and asked some more questions, commented on the parallels of their presentation to ours and then took a minute for a photo together.

Then we were off to eat our lunch using their picnic benches on the front of their property. The food was good as ever and the conversation excellent. After some time and a few more visits to the restrooms, we were on our way to Guilford.

The ride down had a few ups and downs but was for the most part quite safe. I kept watching the other side of the road as a good portion of this part of the ride would be exactly the same tomorrow when we cycled up from Guilford to Hartford. The only major difference was the shoulders on the other side were much smaller and would appear to be more dangerous. I was concerned. Pam apologized a few times more before getting to St. George’s. All were grateful for getting there safely and we were very much on time. Fr Stephen was there to greet us, show us where we would sleep and present and take showers. We would sleep in the Church hall, present in the church gathering space, and shower in the rectory. There were three showers and we were all again grateful for this luxury that poor folks sometimes do not have. The showers felt so good and it was nice to feel clean and refreshed and to relax, especially on the porch of the rectory. We had some time to kill before dinner so the relaxing came in handy. It makes you think of those who cannot take the luxury of just relaxing as they have to worry and struggle as to where their next meal will come from or where they will sleep that night.

We gathered in the church Gathering space which was big and bright and looked freshly painted. St. George’s Men’s Group would be serving us our supper this evening. They have about 65 men in their group. They put on quite a nice spread of food. It was wonderful. We do eat well on this bike ride. Far better than any of those we meet as we visit soup kitchens and shelters or food pantries.

Two of the men sat with Lauren and me as we ate supper. They told all about what good stuff the Men’s Group does. During our conversation we somehow talked about tomorrow’s bike route on Rt. 77. Both men said they thought Rt. 77 to be dangerous and suggested we take Rt. 79 instead. They said Rt. 79 had a wider shoulder and less curves and hills and we would be more visible. The only problem was we would have to divert a bit and go into the center of Madison, about 5 miles out of our way. I decided we would look at that alternative in the morning.

Once supper was done we started to get ready for the presentation. John set us up and people began to arrive. We ended up with a crowd of close to 60 people. Fr Stephen introduced us and made some nice comments about BTC and that he had cycled with us which seemed to give us more credibility. Johnnie opened with our new statement about taking questions afterwards and thus we began the last presentation of our 2016 weeklong. The presentation went along perfectly and once we got to the end we took questions. One woman mentioned how poverty did exist in Guilford and that she knew of a man who was homeless and attended St. George parish in the past. She said they should do more to welcome the homeless and even seek them out. This was perfect as we mentioned the number of people in Guilford in poverty as part of our presentation. Some folks it appeared were totally unaware. Poverty does exist in every town in CT. People are just blind to it. We noticed so many of those in attendance took our handouts. We were hopeful they would write those letters to their state and federal legislators. It was their Take Action step and it appeared they would be doing it. We had some nice discussions as well. We were quite satisfied.

We moved to the Rectory to do our wind up of the day and also to celebrate Fr. Stephen’s 50th birthday. He had a surprise party at Holy Family the previous day, his actual birthday. We all sung happy birthday and shared some cake. Then we did our word of the day.

Tom- Perseverance; Keep Going; Our message, positive response

Wayne – Grateful; for what he learned, the people he talked too, to be with us again

Eric – Hope; the CT Food Bank

Joan- Article in America Magazine

Bob S – Family

Fr. Stephen – Challenged/Inspired; one year anniversary at St. George, Matthew 25, Culture of Outreach, Affluent, Social Change

John – Satisfied

Kathy – Happiness/Joy, Foodbank

Bob K – Reunited; back in company

Rich – Inspiration; Fr. Matt, What we saw, people need

Claire – Well-oiled machine

Lauren – Appreciation; Hospitality; the less fortunate’s stories

Wendy – Knowledge; If you know better…you do better

Johnnie – Responsibility

Pam – Holy Spirit; Ahha moments, Back to Church; Poverty in Vernon; liaison school/church

Lou – Satisfied/Validated

Done by Lou with help from John Ryan, Pam, and Bob King