

RIDING to the Rescue:



Hitting the trail in London (from left, riders Chris Tokarz, Steve Smith, Greg Bell and Larry Wiley, who served as safety detail for the day.

STEVE SMITH'S TOUR DE OHIO RAISES OVER \$4,500 FOR ECSF GRANTS

By Ariel Miller, ECSF Executive Director

CICADA SOSTENATO, CLOVER-SWEET BREEZES, AND BLUE SKIES BLESSED A STURDY BAND OF EPISCOPALIANS WHO BIKED ACROSS OHIO IN MID-AUGUST TO RAISE FUNDS FOR ECSF'S COMMUNITY MINISTRY GRANTS FOR THE COMING YEAR.

OUR QUEST:

HERE'S A JOURNAL WITH BREAKING NEWS FROM VITAL MINISTRIES ALONG THE TRAILS WE TOOK. ALL ARE CURRENTLY RECEIVING GRANTS FROM ECSF OR PLANNING TO APPLY THIS FALL FOR A GRANT FOR 2012.

TO AID LOCAL MINISTRIES SCRAMBLING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF NEIGHBORS still struggling to find work, keep their children from going hungry, and prevent eviction in a year when federal and state budget cuts are forcing more and more Ohioans to turn to churches for aid.

Organized by the Rev. Steve Smith, Rector of St. Patrick's, Dublin, the Tour de Ohio drew five enthusiastic bikers to ride along Ohio's rail-to-trail paths from Central Ohio to the Ohio River. Members of St. Patrick's in Lebanon graciously provided free lodging both nights of the three-day trek.

Joining Steve were fellow parishioner Greg Bell, Procter Conference Center Executive Director Chris Tokarz, and my husband Huxley Miller and me from Ascension and Holy Trinity in Wyoming. Hats off to the wonderful friends who pledged \$4,500 in donations by press time! Every dollar will go into grants.

AUGUST 11:

LONDON TO WAYNESVILLE

We met up early on a bright, cool morning at Procter Conference Center in London, greeted by Larry Wiley of St. Mary's Hillsboro, who served as the team's safety support for the day, meeting us at each stop and staying in touch by cellphone in case any of us needed to be rescued.

After eight miles playing do-si-do with pickups on SR 38, we turned onto the Prairie Trail near downtown London, following the old rail lines past historic depots – even a log cabin in South Charleston. Butterflies danced up from the wildflowers on the verge of cornfields as we rode by.

We stopped for homestyle chili in Cedarville, trudged up iron spiral stairs for a bird-eye view from the turret atop the historic Xenia Station, browsed among aisles of Victorian antiques in Waynesville and were welcomed by warm-hearted humans, cheerful dogs and skeptical llamas in Lebanon, where Skip and Janet Scruby and Norman and Alice Bucher of St. Patrick's took us in for a night of creature comfort.

Mobilizing in Madison County: Ardently supported by Trinity, London, the ecumenical Ministry for Community has been galvanizing residents to tackle this county's unmet needs for several years. Staffed part-time by the incredibly resourceful Catholic community organizer Twyla McNamara, this non-profit incubator has birthed a whole family of non-profits and task forces to meet problems ranging from hunger to prescription drug addiction.

In a single week this spring, Twyla learned of four young people 18-20 years old who were on the verge of homelessness. One was a high school senior whose mother moved to another county, abandoning her without any money in a house about to be foreclosed. The father, estranged, had not communicated with his daughter for years. The student steadfastly continued her studies, no counselor at school aware of her plight. Twyla helped her get a job and a cellphone, find a friend to move in with temporarily, and complete her financial aid applications.



The bike trail follows historic railways. Shown here: the station in South Charleston. Larry, Huxley Miller, and Chris.

Next they tackled the challenge of housing and food. Despite the huge waiting lists for subsidized housing, Twyla was able to land the girl an efficiency for which she pays \$35 a month. A county caseworker angrily denied food stamps, assuming the girl's mother was still living in the house and working in the county, but Twyla vouched for the student in a follow-up interview and won her food stamps and Medicaid.

Working now, with safe housing she can afford, the successful high school graduate is starting classes at Columbus State with a full scholarship.

AUGUST 12: WAYNESVILLE TO TERRACE PARK

Betsy Kitch (r), our safety patrol on day two, never lost us as we wandered through the forests and deep dells of the Little Miami River Valley. Here she is with Greg and Ariel in South Lebanon.



Betsy Kitch of Christ Church, Xenia joined us at St. Mary's Waynesville - she was our guardian angel all day, staying close by in her nimble car through the deep clefts and hills of Southwest Ohio.

Here the trail runs along the Little Miami under dappled shade. The forest breathes chlorophyll and good rich mud. We glimpsed summer cabins and heard the splash of paddles as canoers drifted down the green-gold river. Steve came with us as far as the feet of the soaring I-71 bridge across the river at Fort Ancient: he had to ride back to Dublin for a gig with his rock band. Chris and Greg powered on all the way to Terrace Park while Betsy whispered "Open, Sesame" in old Milford, revealing an awesome toy store to Huxley and me, the newly-minted grandparents of little Eve.

Studying her way out of poverty in Clermont County: A young mother with a seven-year old is working while studying full-time towards a degree that will qualify her for a better-paid job. She lives in affordable housing provided by Thomaston Woods, the 100-unit housing complex developed by St. Thomas, Terrace Park, but summer brought new hardship and she was referred to InterParish Ministry, an ecumenical assistance program aided by Indian Hill Church, St. Thomas, and St. Timothy, Anderson Township.

"She is doing all the right stuff but summer is really hard," says IPM's Sarah Cadle. "During the school year she and her son get by on her student loans and part-time employment, but the loans don't carry over into the summer months and money gets tight. She'd like to work more hours but her employer doesn't want the expense of a full-time employee - she can only get 19 hours a week at the most and is struggling to survive on \$800 a month. IPM paid the utility company \$469 to keep the family's electric from being turned off so they could keep their apartment."

Peddling back north, we arrived for a glorious summer feast put on by St. Mary's parishioners. Half the undercroft is stocked high with canned goods to aid Waynesville families in need. Amazing meatballs and heavenly tomatoes revived us utterly. We squabbled cheerfully over how to describe the gorgeous color of the church's Victorian shingles: pearl grey? Lavender? Male parishioners answered decisively (in a chorus): "St Mary's Blue!"

Back to the Scrubys and the Buchers for an evening of cool drinks and poignant stories.

St. Mary's Blue, with blue sky: This parish hosted us for a wonderful banquet Friday night and the Rev. Peg Denton (second from left) blessed the riders as they set out on the long ride back to Procter.



AUGUST 13: WAYNESVILLE TO LONDON AND POINTS NORTH:

Starting a little later after riding 86-100 miles the day before, we bid thanks and farewell to the Rev. Peg Denton and parishioners at St. Mary's and headed back up the trail, with me driving the luggage back to Procter and meeting up with the other bikers and Steve in Cedarville for burgers and coconut cream pie (Steve, whose gig went great and didn't get to bed till 2:30 a.m., ate cottage cheese). Sun beating down, we pedaled past miles and miles and miles of corn...

Xenia: a young mother's terror turns to joy: Greene County's job agency has been swamped by a 148% increase in visits from desperate job seekers since 2008 - over 46,000 visits in 2010 alone. 62% are displaced workers.

Both the Red Cross and the Family Violence Prevention shelters in Xenia have been over capacity with significant waiting lists for two years, reports Meg Gillis, Director of the Greene County Branch of the Dayton United Way.

Scrubby Four-Footed Welcoming Committee and the Scrubby llamas.





Christ Church, Xenia opens up its parish hall and foyer every night all winter to shelter homeless adults, and has been a supporting congregation of the Interfaith Hospitality Network, a family shelter, for years.

This summer, a young mother shared her family's harrowing experience: "Congratulations, you're pregnant!" A phrase that brings instant joy and happiness to everyone. You are filled with joy and anticipation. Will it be a girl or a boy? Blond hair or brown? Hoping just that it is healthy. This baby will be a welcome addition for its brother and sisters. They can't wait!

"All is right with the world until an unexpected job loss. Everything you have saved is gone at a very quick rate. Then all of a sudden there are no more savings and you see everything in your world spiraling out of control.

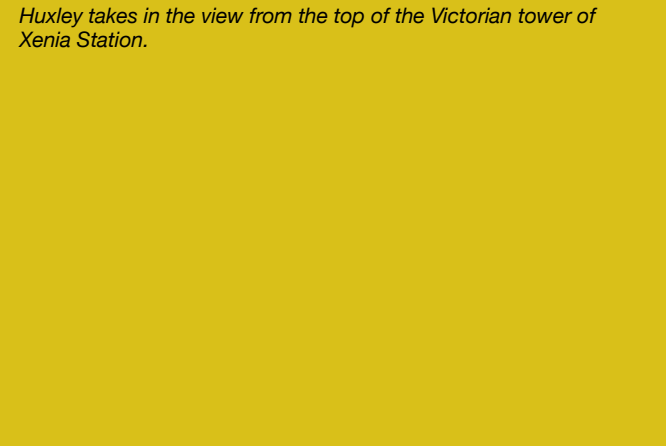
"Then the infamous knock on the door and an eviction has been ordered. What can we do? We stay with family as long as possible then there is nowhere else to go but to a shelter. The excitement and anticipation of the upcoming baby turns to fear. What will a shelter be like? Are we in danger? Are we putting our children in harm's way? Then we have to face it.

"We make our appointment and go for our initial visit. There are other children there, and ours fit right in and begin playing. We are shown our bedrooms. The staff decided that since the baby will be coming soon and some complications have set in I should stay in the downstairs bedroom while my husband and our other children stay in the upstairs bedroom.

"Days turn into a couple of weeks and we don't know who is more excited about the baby's birth, the staff or us. The day arrives we are off to the hospital. All of the other people at the shelter are helping my husband with the children. It is finally time to go 'home.' A few weeks ago I never would have ever thought I would be calling Interfaith Hospitality Network our home, but that is what it has turned into. Staff has become our family as well.

"In a very few weeks we will be going into our new home. We once again have allowed ourselves to get excited. By the way, baby Emma is now two weeks old and is loved by everyone."

As a heat haze settled over the cornfields of Madison County, our legs pumped and our faces grew ruddy as we bikers headed home as well. Chris, not one whit spent, sprinted ahead to greet a conference of Baptist ladies at Procter. Greg got a flat tire but caught up, and we bid farewell to Steve at the trailhead in London. He rode on all the way to Dublin.



Huxley takes in the view from the top of the Victorian tower of Xenia Station.



ECSF fundraising champions! By hosting Chocolate Fest 2011 at St. Patrick's, Dublin in May and organizing the Tour de Ohio bike ride in August, the Rev. Steve and Jan Smith raised over \$27,000 to power community ministry throughout Southern Ohio. Here they are at the great eatery in Cedarville where riders recharged their energy twice on the three day hike.

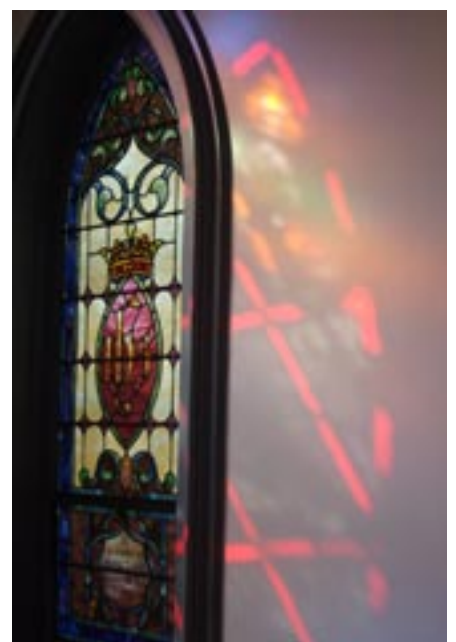
AUGUST 13 EVENING:

ONLY EIGHT MORE MILES FOR GREG, HUXLEY AND ME,

over hills we'd never noticed on SR 38 till we had to cover them under our own leg-power. Bend after bend – finally we saw the welcome red of Procter's barn crowning the next hill and knew we'd made it back.



Thanks be to God - and to all the caring people who sponsored our ride! Now, Lord, help us complete the true marathon of responding to our neighbors' needs in the year ahead!



Afternoon sunshine at St. Mary's Waynesville.