

Happy Monday to all!

On this date, August 18 in 1962, the folk group Peter, Paul & Mary released their hit single, "If I Had a Hammer". This song became a major anthem for the American Civil Rights Movement and a parish favorite at many Catholic folk Masses.

The lyrics use the imagery of a hammer, a bell, and a song to express themes of justice, freedom, and love. The hammer symbolizes action and work, the bell signifies a call to solidarity and freedom, and the song represents collective voice and unity. It encourages listeners to use our "tools" – our skills, voices, and actions – to address injustice and promote positive change in our communities and the world.

I remember my parish community uncharacteristically lifting their voices at the folk masses whenever the guitarist started to play the familiar chords of the song. For a time, we could all imagine the possibility that there could be the love of Christ between all brothers and sisters and all could be equal and share the same freedom, no matter what gender or race they are.

While not directly related to Catholic Charities, the song's message of social justice and love for one's neighbor aligns perfectly with the services and resources still provided by Catholic Charities...63 years after its release. Its powerful words reflect the vision of Catholic Charities in motivating the diocesan community to use one's tools, talents and treasures to build a better world, promoting justice, compassion, understanding and service to others.

The release of the song was sandwiched in between two significant events solidifying the influence of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in shaping social order throughout the world. Pope John XXIII expressed his optimistic spirit in his encyclical *Mater et magistra* (Mother and Teacher) -on Christianity and Social Progress- published on May 15, 1961. It addresses the growing complexity of social relationships in the modern world, particularly the unique concerns facing developing nations. The encyclical invites lay Catholics to employ the "See, Judge and Act" method for putting Catholic social teaching into practice. This is the process used by Catholic Charities, with special emphasis on the "Act" - developing and implementing actions to address identified needs.

Then in 1963, Pope John's second encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth) was published after he assisted in the peaceful resolution of the Cuban Missile crisis between the U.S. and Soviet Union. The encyclical envisions a world community working together for the "universal common good" based on upholding and protecting personal, religious, economic, social and political rights, the first affirmation of wide-ranging human rights in the CST tradition.

"If I had a Hammer" is most certainly a Baby Boomer anthem. Since those days, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z, Generation Alpha, and now Gen Beta have all left their mark on society. Each day reminds us that there are still lots of problems in the world, in our Churches, in our communities and even in our own families. With the much-needed support of families throughout our beautiful and diverse diocese, Catholic Charities continues to swing our hammer, ring our bell and sing our song in order to promote the good of all.

And... unsolicited wisdom from the heart of this Boomer deacon... things just seem a little better, a little brighter, when every now and then you hammer, ring and sing along with Peter, Paul and Mary.

Blessings—Deacon Mike