I would like to challenge all parishioners to get behind this year’s House of Charity: Bishop’s Annual Appeal, ***Faces of Hope.***  Last Saturday, I was asked to take the vigil Mass at St. Joseph the Worker Parish. On the drive over, I was listening to a story from Peter Singer, a human rights professor at Princeton University. He spoke of a man walking to work dressed rather professionally in a nice suit sporting a $200 pair of new shoes. His familiar trek takes him by a shallow pond where he had seen young children swimming and standing on numerous times. On this particular sunny day, he heard cries for help coming from the middle of the lake. A small toddler was in danger of drowning. There was no one else around, no parent, no babysitter. The man knew he had to act quickly and since it was shallow, there would be no risk to him save the clothes and the new shoes that would be ruined as he had no time to take them off. Is this a reason for not saving the child? The child is not his and he is in no way directly responsible for the child. He could move on and save his clothes and shoes. Of course, no one would think this reasoning outweighs the safety of this child. Hopefully, everyone would see that the man was obligated to save the child. ***Now this is just a story.***

What is real is that there are many others who are in great danger whom we can help here and now in our very own diocese through a generous contribution to the House of Charity for the price of nice shoes and trousers. The question is, do we find ourselves obligated? Mother Teresa is credited with saying that the problem with the human race is that we have forgotten that we belong to one another. Do we see others as our sisters and brothers, one with us, equal with us? As I wrote in last week’s bulletin, one of my favorite quotes that Fr. Greg Boyle uses in his book Tattoos on the Heart is from an ordained Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron, who suggests that “Compassion in its truest measure lies not in our service to those on the margins but in our willingness to see ourselves in ***kinship*** with them.” Do we recognize those hurting and in need as truly our sisters and brothers? Are they welcomed into our circle of compassion? Do we see them wearing ***Faces of Hope*** as they look on us? We often echo the same heartfelt sentiment, “we are truly and wonderfully blessed.” Can this be the year we respond fully as a parish to the House of Charity, especially after all we have been through in 2020 and still coping with as we continue in this pandemic of Covid-19? May this be a positive testimony to counteract the venom, anger and rancor that exists in our politics, at times on our streets, and too often in our refusal to accept and to love all others? Sadly division is widening in our Church too. Add to this, that attendance at church has dipped to almost single digits to where people are talking about reinvisioning Church in a whole different way. I think we can change the tide with more random acts of kindness, more vivid and demonstrable expressions of faith. We can people those ***“Faces of Hope.”***

 In his new book, Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, Pope Francis noted that the pandemic has caused him to think much more about the theme of helping others. Commenting on those who have given their lives fighting Covid-19, he wrote that “their choice testified to a belief: that it is better to live a shorter life serving others than a longer one resisting that call.” Such first responders and the like “are the antibodies to the virus of indifference. They remind us that our lives are a gift and we grow by giving of ourselves: not preserving ourselves but losing ourselves in service...We belong to God and to one another and we are part of creation.”

 We are the ***Faces of Hope*** when we visit the ill in nursing homes or hospitals. This has never been more clear than during the pandemic when many of us were the only ones allowed to visit in a critical moments of their precious life privileged to represent their spouse and/or children prohibited from being there due to the crisis. Recently, Mimi Schaible from VITALity Catholic Health Services, has worked closely with three of our parishioners who had or have serious medical conditions, calming their fears and supporting the best plan of action for healthy living. We are the ***Faces of Hope*** when we respond to the new challenges of people who have suffered in new ways from Covid-19 and the economic fallout. We are the ***Faces of Hope*** when we support students who otherwise would not be able to afford a Catholic education. We are the ***Faces of Hope*** when we foster this hope through various campus ministry programs at the secondary and collegiate levels. We are the ***Faces of Hope*** for the poor, the sick, the abandoned, the marginalized and the hopeless when we respond to their needs, tell and show them about our God of Mercy especially to the poor and downtrodden. We are the ***Faces of Hope*** when we feed, clothe and shelter them in various ways through the resources provided by House of Charity. When we make known DACA workshops and provide parish identification cards for the immigrants, we are the ***Faces of Hope***. When we teach these sisters and brothers English and help them to celebrate their own culture in their native tongue especially by the vibrant ministries of the Diocesan Hispanic Ministry we are the ***Rostros de Esperanza***. Over 25 parishes with more than 25 priests serving in Hispanic ministry add to those ***Rostros de Esperanza***. When we support our sisters and brothers with special needs, we are shown their great ***Faces of Hope*** that inspire us to give more. Our ministry to the youth and young adults, so needed in our church, provides our future leaders who are indeed bright ***Faces of Hope*** for a better tomorrow. The House of Charity provides for our next generation of faith leaders by educating our deacon candidates and seminarians.

 Pope Francis suggested that “Covid-19 is our Noah moment, as long as we can find our way to the Ark of the ties that unite us: of love, and of a common belonging.” Let us be the ***Faces of Hope*** by making our support of this year’s House of Charity unlike any before. Let this be our Noah moment bringing many to safety and new beginnings.