

PURE RELIGION

Caring for the 5,000

It was the story of the loaves and fishes—how Jesus was moved with compassion toward the 5,000 who were hungry and had little to eat—that struck a chord in the heart of Steven B. Watts, president of the Gresham Oregon South Stake.

The images of the millions who are hungry in the world today, children without parents and without homes, babies being wrapped in newspapers because there are no blankets—these images struck him as well. If Jesus fed the 5,000, he wondered, why couldn't the members of his stake do something to benefit 5,000 needy children in the world?

The task would not be an easy one. Assembling that many kits would require 10,000 cloth diapers, 5,000 yards of knit fabric, 5,000 bars of soap, 10,000 pins, 7,500 pencils, and a half million sheets of notebook paper. When he discussed the idea with members of his stake, however, he marveled at their response. Ward councils immediately went to work making assignments. Everyone helped, from the high priests to the children in the Primary. The stake's youth committee decided to devote their upcoming youth conference to the activity. Wards devoted Friday night and Saturday morning socials to sewing, stitching, and cutting.

So many wanted to take part. One sister personally sewed 117 blankets and booties. Another sister in a retirement home and afflicted with arthritis slowly crocheted 100 pairs of booties. Two young women sewed nearly 250

As stake members and neighbors worked together, they discovered the joy that comes from serving. They discovered that their small offering, when combined with the love and

blankets. Another woman who had the use of only one hand sewed 40 blankets and dozens of infant gowns. Neighbors who were of other faiths wanted to help as well. At times, homes were filled with 20 or more people helping with the project.

The response was so enthusiastic that President Watts raised the goal from 5,000 to 7,500, and then again to 8,500. When the kits were finally totaled, members of the Gresham Oregon South Stake had assembled more than 9,000 kits.

They weighed more than 10 tons and filled a semi-trailer. They included enough chalkboards to cover 7,700 square feet, enough erasers to fill 10 Volkswagens. If all the pencils had been laid end to end, they would have stretched for 3 miles. The paper would have made a stack 180 feet high. The soap and chalk weighed as much as two mid-sized automobiles.

One member of the stake said, "It took me two eight-hour days to complete the trimming of the blankets, and I was beating myself up because they weren't perfect. . . . I went home thinking I would continue to give money but that it wasn't helping to have me sew. Then the sweet spirit of the project whispered to me that my heart was right. The receivers wouldn't care if my blankets weren't perfect. They would feel the warmth of the gift from the heart." Another wrote, "I felt overwhelming love for people I didn't know."

sacrifice of others, could multiply and touch the lives of thousands of others.

