

PURE RELIGION

And They Cleansed the Chambers

On an early January morning, armed with a 16-pound sledge hammer, intruders smashed the rear door of the Houston storehouse and cannery and entered. They crushed locks, broke pictures, rummaged through desks, ransacked files, destroyed cash registers, and shattered computers. They threw eggs and spilled milk, cooking oil, and detergent on the floors. They smeared pies over the walls. And as they left, they set off fire extinguishers, blanketing shelves, machinery, walls, and floors with toxic powder.

When the storehouse crew entered the building that Thursday morning, they wept as they inspected the desecration that took place the night before. Their first reaction was shock—that anyone could wantonly vandalize any building, let alone one that had so often been used as an instrument to bless the lives of those in need. Their second reaction was typical of the Latter-day Saint spirit—they went to work. So much needed to be done: the damage needed to be assessed, the building secured, and the shelves, machinery, floors, and walls needed to be cleaned.

The cannery staff wondered if they should cancel a peanut butter run that had been scheduled for Friday, eight days from then. Even

though canceling would put the peanut butter quota a full month behind, they could not see an alternative. They had to cancel.

As word of the break-in spread, Church members began to pour into the facility. By the end of the first day, new handles and locks were installed on the doors. The complex once again was secure. On the Saturday after the break-in, more than one hundred members arrived, some traveling two hours to help. Members who had come for food orders or to do dry-pack canning set their plans aside and helped in the clean-up. They dismantled shelves,



took apart the food processing machinery, and cleaned toxic chemicals from each piece. Carpets were professionally cleaned, walls and ceilings were sanitized. When clean-up crews finished, paint crews followed in their footsteps. Afterward, volunteers reassembled the shelving and machinery.

In all, Church members volunteered more than 1,000 hours to clean and repair the facilities. The following Monday, volunteers restocked the storehouse in time to issue food on Tuesday. The canceled cannery run was reinstated—peanut butter again flowed from the extruders.