

# PURE RELIGION

## A Dress a Day

It was the images of children—poor, hungry, wearing little more than rags—that changed Marelle Gardner’s life.

A member of the Welby Eighth Ward of the West Jordan Welby Stake, Sister Gardner lives fairly close to the Latter-day Saint Humanitarian Center in Salt Lake City, and one day she decided to take a tour of the facility. While there, she stopped in front of the photographs displayed there of boys and girls who had so much need and so little opportunity, and she began to wonder if there was something she could do.

The longer she pondered, the more an idea began to form. She had an old sewing machine. She was a pretty good seamstress. With five boys, she’d never had much reason to make little girls’ dresses. Perhaps what she could do was sew a dress for a little girl who didn’t have one of her own.

The more she thought about it, the more she liked the idea of doing something for needy children who had only dirty, ragged, and old clothing. She thought of how happy a little girl would be to try on, perhaps for the first time in her life, a new dress.

That enthusiasm gave way to a resolution. For a period of one year, Marelle Gardner committed she would make a dress a day, and at the end of the year she would have completed 365 dresses.

The LDS Humanitarian Center wanted simple patterns with few buttons (buttons can get lost and make the dress unusable), and so Sister Gardner began searching for a pattern. She found the perfect one at a Deseret Industries store and paid 10 cents for it.

Then she began searching for fabric. She had some at home; she purchased some at Deseret Industries; friends began bringing their remnants to her. And Sister Gardner began her work.

She loved it!

“It takes about two hours to make a dress,” she says. “When I finish one, I think about the smile on the face of the little girl who will have something new to wear.” She loves her sewing work so much that she considers it a reward after finishing other obligations.

“My sewing machine is the same one I used to make my wedding dress 30 years ago,” she says. “It’s so old, I pray over it every day, hoping it will last long enough for me to complete another one of these dresses.” So far, the sewing machine is working well. In six months, Sister Gardner has made more than 200 dresses.

“I’ve always been a busy person,” she says. “I didn’t think I would have time to do this. But what I discovered was that when you’re interested in something, you find the time.”

Not only is it satisfying to complete a dress, but Sister Gardner says the process is a tremendous stress reliever. “It’s amazing what you can do if you use the spare minutes in the day.”

“My husband and sons want constant updates on how many dresses I’ve done. They cheer me on and ‘ooh’ and ‘ah’ over my latest creations. It feels good to know I’m doing something for someone.”

For Sister Marelle Gardner, turning cloth into dresses has transformed the fabric of many people’s lives—perhaps not the least of which is her own.