

PURE RELIGION

The Slippers That Softened a Heart

The little grandmother, old beyond her years, stood defiantly in front of a crumbling shack that served as her home. She seemed sick and weighted down with unspoken and perhaps unfathomable cares. Nine barefoot and poorly dressed grandchildren stood by her side. The oldest, a 19-year-old girl, cradled an infant on her hip.

“Who are you? What do you want?” she asked.

Elder and Sister Hansen of Iona, Idaho, humanitarian service missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, approached her. They had been visiting needy families in Voronezh, Russia, all day, accompanying Mataska Svetlana, the wife of a Russian Orthodox priest—a woman who worked tirelessly helping needy families in her area.

“These people are here to help,” Mataska told her. “They’ve come to help.”

Mataska Svetlana is known as the Mother Teresa of Voronezh. As economic conditions deteriorated and many Russians suffered from hunger and cold, Mataska Svetlana organized groups to help. She feeds and clothes thousands of people in Voronezh each year.

The Hansens were so impressed with the work Mataska was doing, they submitted a request for a grant for \$7,500 through Latter-day Saint Charities that would support the work being done by Mataska’s organization. It was approved.

With that money, they purchased school supplies for children who had none and blankets,

sheets, pillows, and mattress pads for those who were cold at night. They bought soap and towels and light bulbs and shoes. Wherever they went, it was as though Santa Claus himself had descended from his sleigh. Thanks to Mataska’s frugality and insistence on bargain prices, the money stretched farther and farther. They bought sacks of food and 500 pairs of socks and tights, and still they had money left.



Their final visit was to this family who lived in this little shack. The mother had died, leaving nine children. The father was working away from home, trying to provide an income for his children. So the children and grandmother were left to survive as best they could. As the grandmother explained their situation, tears coursed down her cheeks. What could she do? She was old and lame and sick. How could she clothe her grandchildren? How could she provide food for their hungry stomachs?

As the Hansens brought out the sacks of food and placed shoes on the feet of all the children, the grandmother continued to weep, this time out of gratitude and joy. Finally the old, worn slippers were pulled away from the grandmother’s gnarled feet. As they were replaced with a new pair of slippers, the old and hardened grandmother wept appreciatively and thanked the missionaries for their kindness.

“It was one of those times,” Sister Hansen later wrote, “when you truly feel that the Lord is well-pleased—even when it involves something as insignificant as a new pair of slippers.”