



Pastor Paul Arnopoulos has become known for his massive food giveaways, including special holiday feasts for the needy (Carole Lynn Shew photo).

Pastor Paul prepares a feast for the needy

by Carole Lynn Shew

Most people spend the holidays feasting; Pastor Paul Arnopoulos spends the holidays at his mission church preparing a feast for the needy of Minneapolis and surrounding communities.

Yet "food dispensing" is a lot more than handing out bags of food, says Arnopoulos and his staff of volunteers at Disciples Ministry Church Mission, which is housed in a converted synagogue at 1000 Oliver Avenue N. in Minneapolis. Those who receive groceries also receive the gospel message.

"When I go out I minister the gospel right along. I've led as many as 45 in a group to the

Lord at one time," Arnopoulos says. "I pray with people, and Christian volunteers talk to people and minister the gospel to them."

Arnopoulos believes that providing food for the needy is a good part of what the gospel is all about. "If a man's hungry, feed him," he says. "Feeding and breaking bread has a lot to do with ministering the gospel. What better place is there to minister the gospel than when you're breaking bread with somebody?" he asks.

Pastor Paul Arnopoulos moved to Minneapolis from Brooklyn Park nine years ago, but did not become involved with "food dispensing" until he

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"saw the need" two years later. "I went to one home with one bag; today it's 12,000 bags a month," he says.

Grocery bags are distributed from the church and hot meals are served there Monday-Friday from noon to 1:00. Tables and chairs provide "a real nice atmosphere," says Arnopoulos, and he and volunteers "wait tables to add dignity. It's a fixed menu but I still wait on them." There are special services provided for seniors and a clothing closet provides "one full grocery bag of clothing per person per day."

Arnopoulos also travels to a variety of spots in the city with grocery bags and hot meals to reach those who cannot reach him. For three years he's operated a "hobo bus" equip-



Volunteers fill grocery bags with a cafe that seats 35. "I go under the Seventh-street bridge, behind Butler Square in Minneapolis, off Second Avenue," says Arnopoulos, who feeds "130 guys a night." He provides each person with one meal and a bag lunch "so they don't have to worry where their next meal is coming from," and will provide clothes

or blankets as well to those who request them.

A "bread bus and grocery give-away" is held every Saturday morning at 11:30 at Emerson and Broadway North in St. Paul, where Arnopoulos says he and volunteers give away 7500 grocery bags monthly. "Five thousand grocery bags are given special at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas," says Arnopoulos.

Arnopoulos is able to distribute such a large volume of food — which he says is "the largest, consistent bag give-away" in the country — through donations by individuals and organizations that he works with. "I even get calls in from Texas," he notes. At times he receives truckloads of foods that are still good but are too close to their expiration date to sell in retail stores. He

works with "whoever I have to get it," he says, including semi-truck operators who need to "drop their load" and would have to pay to have it thrown away if they couldn't give it to Disciples Ministry Church Mission. "Much of this food would just be thrown away," says Arnopoulos.

Getting enough, however, is still a problem for Arnopoulos, who has dreams of expanding his ministry even wider to include a needy housing project as well as expanding food distribution. "The only thing that holds me back is cash flow," he says. Much of the work of food processing is done by hand but could be accomplished by machines if someone would donate the equipment or the funds to buy it.

For now, Arnopoulos works with armies of volunteers, who,

he says, come by tens and twenties, sometimes even in groups of fifty or more, from a range of churches including Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Catholic, and others. "We're kind of a melting pot down here," says Arnopoulos. "People mingle and find out they have one thing in common — Christ."

Feeding the hungry is a consuming work but the rewards are rich, according to Arnopoulos, who says, "Jesus will ask everyone in the end, 'where were you when I was hungry?'"

Action Box

For information on participating in outreach programs of the Disciples Ministry Church Mission, call 521-4665.