

# METRO



PIONEER PRESS PHOTOS BY JOE ODEN



Thousands of people wait outside the Disciples Ministry Church Mission for free groceries Wednesday in North Minneapolis. The Easter food giveaway is a project of the mission's pastor, Paul Arnopoulos, left. The mission estimates it distributes 10 million pounds of free food each year.

## Despite chill, thousands wait hours for free food

■ Minneapolis mission provides Easter bounty

WAYNE WANGSTAD STAFF WRITER

Vera Benton, a 79-year-old widow who subsists solely on Social Security, was shivering by noon Wednesday, even though she was wearing "two of everything."

For 5½ hours, Benton had waited outside a former synagogue at 1000 Oliver Ave. N. in Minneapolis to ensure that she would receive an Easter bounty of two free bags of food from the Disciples Ministry Church Mission.

"I think it's real nice. People sure appreciate it; there are a lot of people who need it," said Benton, who will use the food she received for her Easter dinner.

By 4 p.m. Wednesday, 50 to 60 volunteers had distributed about 6,000 bags of groceries from the mission basement, and another 6,000 from the parking lot. The food given to more than 5,000 people included a frozen chicken, canned goods, dry cereal, juice and bakery products.

Mission officials estimated that each person received an average of about \$35 worth of food and said the total giveaway value exceeded \$175,000. Because much of the food is donated, they projected the giveaway actually cost the mission about \$0,750.

Those numbers are impressive, but a better measure was the visual impression left by the needy — from both Minneapolis and St. Paul — waiting for food. Confined to the sidewalk by snow fencing draped with ferns, they stood five to six across in a line that stretched north on Oliver Avenue to the corner of 12th Avenue North, then extended a block east to Newton Avenue, where it veered south for another half block.

Led by pastor Paul Arnopoulos, the church mission also distributes groceries on Christmas, a total of about 10 million pounds of food annually. With its Monday through Friday grocery distributions, and daily breakfasts and lunches, the mission serves about 40,000 people a month, Arnopoulos said.

Twenty companies contributed food for the Easter giveaway, he said. About 90 percent of the food distributed by the mission annually is donated by various organizations. The rest is purchased through contributions.

## FOOD

▼ CONTINUED FROM 10

The mission also operates a temporary job placement service and intends to open a store that will sell new clothing to needy people at prices they can afford.

Of the people who received groceries Wednesday, Arnopoulos estimated that 2 percent did not need the food.

"Maybe 1 percent are pack rats who give it away, but the other 99 percent are in true need," he said.

Arnopoulos owned an electrical repair and maintenance business until 1973, when after attending a church service he "felt a need to change" and started the mission church in Brooklyn Park. He moved to the former synagogue five years later.

The satisfaction Arnopoulos receives from the mission church "is a fulfilling of the scriptures, a feed-my-sheep type of thing. ... It comes down to meeting the basic needs of people," he said.

Arnopoulos, 60, conducted services Friday nights and Sundays until a year ago, when he decided to devote full time to the food and jobs program and to starting the clothing store.

He also operated a grocery giveaway program from a vacant lot in St. Paul for eight years. He intends to begin a similar program again in St. Paul and is searching for a suitable building.

FOOD CONTINUED ON 8B ►