



JEAN PERRY/PIONEER PRESS
Melba Mackins of Burnsville takes a break at about 3:30 p.m. Wednesday while Christmas shopping at the Mall of America. She said she'd been shopping since 11 a.m.

From missions to malls

Rich and poor alike line up for holiday cheer



SCOTT TAKUSHI/PIONEER PRESS
A woman who had waited in a long line in the near-zero cold Wednesday leaves the Disciples Ministry Church Mission in North Minneapolis with a bag of free Christmas groceries.

■ Minneapolis church gives free food to 5,000 in need

TIM NELSON STAFF WRITER

Michael Holcombe's beard was frosted white by the time he reached the front door of the Disciples Ministry Church Mission on Wednesday. He stood in line on the sidewalk outside for nearly an hour to pick up his family's Christmas dinner.

"I used to make \$15 an hour and work 70 hours a week if I wanted to," said Holcombe, a former Honeywell machinist. A 35-year-old father of four, he said he'd been unemployed for about five years.

"I had a good job, and I worked hard," he said, stamping his tennis shoes on the ice that covered the mission's sidewalk. His wife, Sherri, and the couple's children — from a 16-year-old boy to an infant son — waited inside a van parked nearby.

"Here I am now, standing in line waiting for a bag of groceries," he said.

So were more than 5,000 others, shuffling slowly through a snow fence chase outside the North Minneapolis church. Bundled up against the 8-degree cold, a few of them wrapped in blankets, the crowd huddled down half a block of Oliver Avenue, trying to stay warm on Wednesday afternoon.

A 55-gallon plastic container filled with donated clothing was

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■ Business as usual at megamall — except for swamped Santa

LARRY MILLETT STAFF WRITER

At the Mall of America on the eve of Christmas Eve, the only long line to be found consisted of tired parents and their fidgety children waiting to see that symbol of store-bought generosity, Santa Claus.

The mall's Santa, a rather thin fellow in an oversized red suit, was stationed in the east rotunda in front of a holiday house surmounted by a huge fake Christmas tree adorned with Snoopy dolls.

The line at one point circled all around the house, contained by a fence made of giant, colorfully wrapped packages with electronically operated lids, which opened now and then to reveal frolicking figures inside.

It was very much Christmas American style, the packages adding just the proper mercantile flavor to the proceedings.

Yet anyone expecting to encounter a ho, ho, horrible Christmas experience Wednesday at America's premier palace of commerce probably left disappointed.

Although charity wasn't much in evidence (the only Salvation Army kettle to be seen, at the mall's east entrance, was locked and unattended), neither were there any displays of egregiously conspicuous consumption.

In fact, it seemed pretty much business as usual at the

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