



To help more, mission gives up giveaway

By Kurt Chandler
Staff Writer

Call it too much of a good thing.

For 15 years, Pastor Paul's Mission in north Minneapolis has held one of the biggest Thanksgiving Day food giveaways in the Twin Cities, handing out groceries to thousands of poor people — always in focus of an admiring local media.

But this year, Pastor Paul Arnopolous decided to put need before public relations. "The decision was: 'Do you want to look good or do good?'" he said.

Stuffing grocery sacks for the mission's massive holiday giveaways each Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter normally takes volunteers an entire week. As a result, the church has been forced to close its soup

kitchen, and cancel its daily meal program and weekday grocery giveaway for the duration.

But this year, instead of obliging the TV cameras and reporters, Pastor Paul's Mission (formerly the Disciples Ministry Church) decided to stay open during the week and shut down today.

It's a simple matter of economics, Arnopolous explained. The church can feed more people during its regular weekday hours than through its holiday program.

"We can do better by staying open," he said. "So by being so successful, we kind of worked our way right out of that giveaway."

The mission serves daily breakfasts and dinners to 40,000 people each month in the church's basement

kitchen at 1000 Oliver Av. N. On Monday through Friday, it distributes sacks of groceries in the kitchen. Groceries also are handed out from 2 to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays in the alley behind the church, and from noon to 2 p.m. on Fridays at the mission's south Minneapolis outlet, 24th St. and 15th Av. S.

"Success has brought about getting right!" Arnopolous said.

Success also has brought more food. During the Tuesday giveaways, up to 100,000 pounds of food is distributed.

Much of the food is donated by wholesale food companies and over-the-road truckers — contacts Arnopolous has made over the years.

Because of schedule changes or mechanical problems with semitrucks,

drivers sometimes need to unload produce in a hurry. Arnopolous, who holds an over-the-road license himself, has put the word out that the mission will gladly accept most any kinds of food.

And as the donations increase, storage space has become premium.

To accommodate truckloads of food donations, the mission plans to build a 7,500-square-foot expansion behind the church. It will include three loading docks and an additional cooler and freezer to hold perishables.

"We'll have a regular depot here," Arnopolous said.

The mission's next meal program will be on Monday.