

North City 3
North Minneapolis
St. Anthony

Church meets physical, spiritual needs

By Christine Hudgins
Staff Writer

When the Rev. Paul Arnopoulos talks about putting legs on his prayers, he means it.

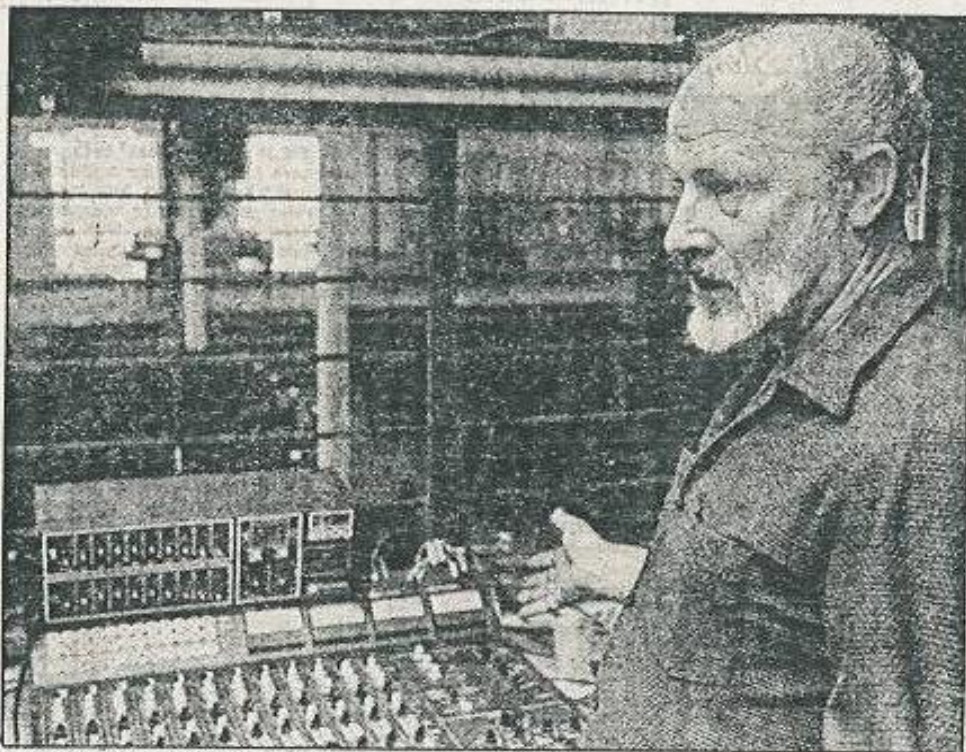
He even puts a few muscles on the legs of those who follow him—four steps at a time—up the stairs of his church. For four years Arnopoulos has been working to turn a former synagogue into the Disciples Ministry.

Doctrine isn't his big concern at this nondenominational evangelical church. He said he learned in the first awkward days four years ago—when he transplanted his crowded Brooklyn Park church to the neighborhood—that passing out religious tracts doesn't mean a lot to folks.

"You have to start meeting physical needs," he said. And that's what his church did.

Today, the church at 1000 Oliver Av. N. offers lunch every weekday and passes out \$30 bags of groceries to 700 families every month. Every Wednesday and Saturday, bread, rolls and an occasional bag of noodles are distributed at the corner of Emerson Av. and Broadway. Arnopoulos said church members sometimes have as many as 500 bags of bread to pass out and that it's usually gone within a matter of minutes.

The food comes from stores such as Red Owl, Country Stores, Sherman Bakery and Mr. Frank's Bakery. County Seat donated 700 new blouses to be given away in the church's clothing distribution center. That's in the basement of the church, a vast area filled with the aroma of bubbling soup. At one



Staff Photo by David Brewster

Pastor Paul Arnopoulos offers his message on more than 1,000 tapes sent each week to Africa, prisons and other places.

end of the building are racks of free clothes, many left from church garage sales. At the other end are tables for dining and a jungle gym where visiting children can play.

Arnopoulos said the number of people who eat lunch at the church

varies, but there have been as many as 60 in an afternoon. And Arnopoulos isn't the least bit shy about his soup. He says he's Greek and that his influence in the kitchen works wonders.

So, why did a former electrical press contractor and professional

dancer spend \$125,000 for a decaying church on the north side?

Arnopoulos said he wondered about that, too—especially one morning at 2 o'clock when he was praying in the sanctuary. The room that is now his office was coated with mold, toilets were tipped over

and walls were falling in. He spent days on his back on a scaffold, painting the sanctuary.

What perhaps was even harder to repair was the church's link to the community. The synagogue had moved out during the race riots of 1968. Arnopoulos moved in with a predominantly white congregation from the suburb of Brooklyn Park.

It's only in the past two years that Arnopoulos says he's seen the church becoming a part of the community. Now, he said, about 10 percent of the congregation comes from the surrounding area. Others receive services from the church.

He said he felt the changing role of the church in the community almost the way one feels a friendship growing. "It's like when you get to know a person," he said. "When you relax and find things in common. You find out that they get hungry and get tired and have needs."

Arnopoulos said he knew before coming to this church that there was poverty in the area but he didn't realize exactly what that meant. Now, he's been to houses where several families live together because they can't find jobs and where the only furnishings are a chair and a television set on the floor. He's seen families in winter without heat and he's worked with runaways, prostitutes and drug and alcohol abusers.

In a way, that's all up his alley. When he was 13 he spent time in a boys' home in South Dakota and he said he's served jail time for drunken driving. All of that was before he found God more than a

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