

Bus brings food and God's message to homeless

By Weady S. Tai
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Like moths drawn to light, the men came out of the darkness.

But the bus, parked beneath the N. 7th St. viaduct on a recent chilly evening, promised more than warmth.

It was the first night the bus had come to feed, clothe and deliver God's message to the city's homeless. "The Bible says, 'Go to the highways and byways and minister to all creation,'" said Pastor Paul Arapopoulos of the Disciples Ministry in north Minneapolis.

So he did.

And the hungry responded. Shadowy figures against dimming daylight, they walked through the muddled lot of railroad tracks, trailers and wood pilings Thursday night to receive a hot meal and whatever else the ministry could give.

"We need a dinner bell real bad," said Rick Lindsey, a ministry volunteer, as he and others bustled about the kitchen in the back of the converted church bus.

But the men who stepped inside had needed no dinner announcement; they already knew that free meals would be driven to the isolated spot where the homeless often gather. "Word gets around," one man said.

The "word" was that free food and clothing would begin coming to them nightly, delivered by a pastor and some volunteers who knew what life is like on the street.

So the men didn't hesitate to walk into the unfamiliar vehicle, where bright lights revealed their stubble and stained clothes.

Most said little as they sat down, surveying the yellow-patterned curtains, the yellow bar stools, the built-in countertop and booths. When soup and bologna sandwiches came, they ate greedily, sopping up the soup with white bread. In 15 minutes the windows frosted over with humidity, and seven men filled the diner with sounds of dinner and chatter.

"Pastor sir, thank you very much. I appreciate this," one man said as he waited for a second helping of soup. His buddy across the table from him said, "You better do a hundred push-ups quick" to help digest the amount of food he was eating.

Several others pointed to their empty bowls and mumbled, "More." Many did that four to five times. And five members of the church, including Arapopoulos, waited on them, passing full bowls, sandwiches and sweet rolls across the narrow aisle.

"You get enough to eat? You warm enough?" the pastor asked around.



Staff Photos by Bruce Bisping

The Disciples Ministry bus, parked beneath the N. 7th St. viaduct, offered the hungry a hot meal, blankets and warmth.



Those who came were fed soup and bologna sandwiches.



Richard Lindsey and Pastor Paul Arapopoulos dished out meals.



The bus will be parked under the viaduct every evening for about a month. Then it will begin making several stops each night.

A man wearing a red coat and dark glasses asked, "You got a blanket coming?" He also asked for a paper bag to hold sandwiches, popcorn and sweet rolls that he wanted to take along.

Arapopoulos passed a grey blanket to him, but another man intercepted it and said, "Thank you." Then, turning to the red-coated man whose hands

reached out, the man said, "Too late."

In an hour, more than a dozen men were fed. Asked where they sleep, they invariably answered, "here and there." Asked their names, some refused or gave only first names. The man with the red coat declined to identify himself, explaining, "I'm so proud."

Most wore old but clean clothing many needed a shave; several had tattoos. Some were young; most were middle-aged, but universally they wore a look of defeat.

"They're very sweet spirited," Arapopoulos said later in the evening. One man, he said, had confided that he feared losing the sight in one eye, and Arapopoulos told him, "I'll pray

for your eye." The man began to weep, the pastor recalled. "It's most rewarding when I lead somebody to the Lord, like tonight."

He said he wants to continue his mission every night from 5 to 7 at the same place for about a month. After that the bus will visit several sites each night.