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Disciples Ministry volunteer Sampson Gipson, right, helps distribute fresh produce on a recent Wednesday at Selby Avenue and Victoria Street in St. Paul.

Pentecostal church ministers to hungry souls

■ Disciples Ministry gives food to Twin Cities poor

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When the poor line up for free food at Selby Avenue and Victoria Street on Wednesdays, they stand in silence. Hungry people do not make joyful sounds.

But when the line starts moving toward a truck carrying 15,000 pounds of

fresh produce, the expectant chatter begins. And when those in line have the box or sack of food in their arms, the smiles break out and the laughter rings through the winter cold.

On a recent Wednesday, a woman standing on the corner with an overflowing box of vegetables said to anybody who would listen, "This is a wonderful thing. I don't know what I would do without you people. I'm going to pray for you."

With unemployment rising and safety nets falling, food lines such as these have become a more common scene. But what sets apart the weekly distribution at Selby and Victoria is that it is run by the Disciples Ministry, a small Pentecostal church in North Minneapolis.

For years, mainline Protestant, Catholic and Jewish congregations have been conducting active ministries to poor people, providing food, clothing and shelter. That has not been true of Pentecostals

and other evangelical churches, which have been among the fastest growing parts of Christianity in recent years.

But there are at least a few signs — the efforts of the Disciples Ministry among them — that could be changing.

The Disciples Ministry delivers 35,000 pounds of food each week to people on the streets, and the Rev. Paul Arnoopoulos says his Disciples Ministry serves 40,000

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