Bus brings food and God’s message to homeless

By Wendy S. Tai
Staff Writer

Like musk draws 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 Armpolous of the Disciples Ministry in north Minneapolis.

So he did.

And the hungry responded. Shadowy figures against dimming daylight, they walked through the muddy lot of railroad tracks, trailers and wood piles 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-pattered curtains, the yellow horseshoes, the bulletins on the table and the menu. A sign for the rows of chairs, and the dining area.

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.

Armpolous 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 were a look of defeat.

“They’re very sweet-spirited,” Armpolous said later in the morning. One man, he said, had confessed that he feared losing the sight in one eye, and Armpolous told him, “I’ll pray for your eye.” The man began to weep, the pastor recalled. “It’s most rewarding when I read 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.

The bus will be parked under the same place for about a month. The bus will be parked under the viaduct every evening for about a month.