Buses bring hope to hungry

Church-run food giveaway helps 35,000 every month

By Clark Morath

The fruit and vegetables come by the truckload, slightly bruised and sometimes paid for in comparison to the produce found in most markets.

Once a week, volunteers from the Disciples Ministry load it on the back of an old four-wheeler that sits on the sidewalk at the corner of Selby and East in St. Paul and give it away absolutely free.

Every Wednesday at noon, the people line up to receive a bag of fruit and vegetables and bread as priority as they can carry home. And when they walk away with armfuls, many are sporting a tentative smile, knowing hunger will not run the next line down their family’s life.

One man’s ministry

It’s the ministry of one man, the Rev. Paul Arpocaps, and it’s laugh. Pentecostal preacher who led religion through a high-spirited conversion in 1972. Following the religious experience, Arpocaps found his future would be transformed. He closed down a parking service he owned in California and moved north to attend the Compassion Bible College in St. Paul.

After a short course in Bible and theology, Arpocaps moved to Minneapolis to open a small Pentecostal church near 16th Avenue and Brooklyn Park. For the past three years, he has been ministering to a small congregation in an abandoned Jewish synagogue at 1800 Oliver Avenue S.

Since January, Arpocaps has been hauling food into St. Paul, hoping to bring some relief to the people of the area. He’s only two years of his total operation that, he said, gives away millions of dollars in food every year.

On top of that, each day 150 people are fed a nourishing, free lunch and dinner in the dining room of the church. Once a week, the dining room is reserved only for senior citizens, and they are served a special meal. Last week, it was turkey with all the trimmings. There were 30 people.

Busloads of food

In addition to the St. Paul food giveaway, twice a week, the Disciples Ministry’s bus stops at the corner of Emerson and Broadway in Minneapolis and bags up bags of bread, fruit and potatoes and sends them to the church.

As at Christmas and Easter, 20,000 special bags of food filled with holiday fare are distributed to the poor in the church’s neighborhood.

And there are holiday celebrations, too, where “The Feed of the Poor” serves food to more than 5,000 people on the Fourth of July, Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Aropecaps also operates a “hobo bus,” which he parks under a variety in downtown Minneapolis, at 5 p.m., everyday. Inside the brightly lit bus, street people find a miniature restaurant with food and drinks at a counter. There they get food, usually a hot bowl of soup, a piece of bread and fruit.

The Disciples Ministry, which

Photos by Keith Turner/Staff Photographer