

Ministry/ Food for poor 'miraculously' appears

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Arzopoulos moved to North Minneapolis from Brooklyn Center in 1979, serves 35,000 people a month and claims to distribute more food than any other food bank in the nation. "If you call a regular food bank a bank, this is the Federal Reserve," Arzopoulos said.

Begging from help

To maintain the momentum of this food giveaway, Arzopoulos has become a shameless beggar at the corporate level. He has contacts with most major food distributors, supermarkets and bakeries. He'll take a truckload of loaves or a ton of turkey necks. Last week, he had 7.5 tons of ground beef sitting in the church freezers and last year, in one Herrmann giveaway, he disposed of 700,000 peppers.

Aside from a \$37,000 grant from Hennepin County, Arzopoulos said the \$225,000 operation runs on donations, gifts, receipts from his radio and audio tape ministry and donations from the 150 members of his congregation.

He's a man with a thousand angles, and if there is a need for food, Arzopoulos will strive to fill it. He remembered the "Prayer for the Poor" on Memorial Day when 5,000 to 6,000 people were expected to show up for a free lunch. A quick look in the church freezers told Arzopoulos there was no food to be served.

Hours before the day of the prayer, a man telephoned and begged Arzopoulos to take 5,000 loaves sandwiches off his hands. Arzopoulos agreed, and the picnic played to 5,000 satisfied people.

"I pray and I fast," Arzopoulos said. "I've eaten one meal a day for the last three years. I give it to the glory of God, and he brings the food to me."

But the food does not miraculously appear without a major effort on the part of Arzopoulos, two paid staff members and a host of volunteers, some who work full-time at the church. Arzopoulos said he works 17 hours a day, seven days a week and said the satisfaction he receives is worth the sacrifice.

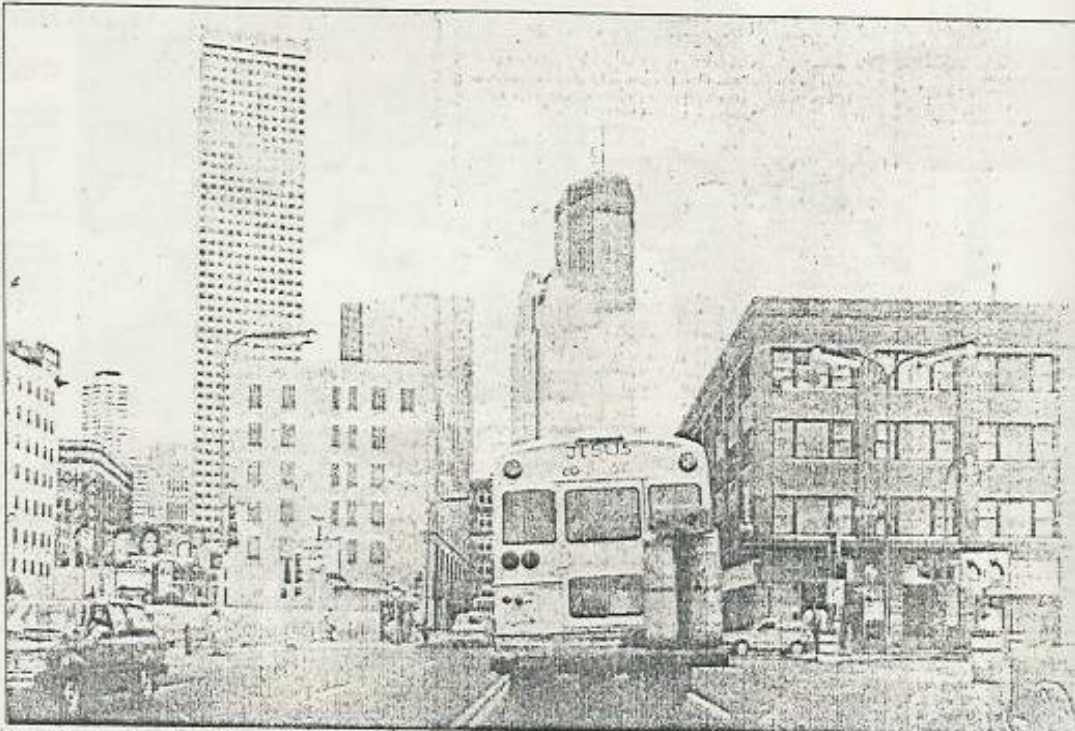
Relief in sight

On a recent Wednesday morning in St. Paul, people began queuing up at 11 a.m., and by noon, 200 people were looking toward Minneapolis for relief.

When they saw the bright blue bus rattling down Selby Avenue, the crowd re-formed and nudged in close to the spot where the back end of the bus would come to a rest. Volunteers Roy Auger and Al Stuart, both retirees from the East Side of St. Paul, moved the crowd off the street and onto the sidewalk.

When the bus rolled to a stop, Disciples Ministry volunteer George Koch and his helpers threw open the back doors, piled in 18-year-old Lakisha Dailey and her 11-year-old brother, Damon, to help carry bread bags to the door. And a frenzy of charity began.

Emma Jensen, who cleans houses for a living, walked away with a bag of firm cucumbers, sweet ribs, bread and a few times. Jensen said she seldom has missed a Disciples Ministry giveaway



Photos by Keith Teter/Staff Photographer

The "hobo bus" of Disciples Ministry is a familiar sight in Minneapolis as it makes its daily run to aid the city's street people.



The Rev. Paul Arzopoulos, Disciples Ministry pastor, is the driving force behind food programs like this one, at right, which provides hot meals to the city's down and out.



since her husband became unemployed.

Another woman, a young housewife from the area, with a working husband and four children, said she took 25 pounds of tomatoes home the previous week, quartered them and canned the whole batch for the winter.

"The stuff isn't always fresh," she said. "But, my God, if you find a rotten apple in your bag, you throw it out. It's free."

A 73-year-old woman said she comes into St. Paul to pick up free groceries for two poor families in her Minneapolis neighborhood.

"All the sweet stuff goes in the little kids," she said. "I don't eat sweets myself. I'm retired, and the Lord has blessed me so I could work till I was 70 years old. And this is something I can do to give thanks."

An hour after the giveaway began, the bus was empty and the

volunteers were cleaning up the area. "We go around and pick up what people leave," said Betty Van Denbevel, a volunteer who has recently moved into the Twin Cities.

"When I moved back here with my two daughters, the church helped me," she said. "We needed a lot of help — clothes, shelter, food. We'd go there for meals almost everyday."

Now Van Denbevel wants to

give some of that help back to the church. She's working steadily in the construction business, and if it weren't for the kidney transplant her youngest daughter needs and the mounting medical bills, she might be financially stable.

As Van Denbevel talked about her family's future, she wondered aloud how she would fund the financial support she needs. Then she turned with a thin smile and said, "I do the best I can."

Arzopoulos says the people who come to him for help are "sweet-spirited" people who have faced lingering hardship without giving in to despair. And he knows the work he does brings them some hope.

"The Lord said, 'I will make you willing in the day of my power,'" Arzopoulos said. "I've been made willing. I really love what I'm doing."