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Pastor Paul Arnopoulos of Minneapolis (far right) has distributed food to all comers at the corner of Selby and Dale

every Wednesday since New Year's Day.

Thousands flock to minister's call

by Thomas Perry

Pastor Paul Arnopoulos awoke at 2:30 a.m. on New Year's Day with a solution to his problem.

On the previous day, his Disciples Ministry Church Mission in North Minneapolis had given to the needy 2,900 bags of groceries out of a total of 5,000 bags. He called area radio and television stations and asked them to announce that the remaining 1,100 sacks of food would be distributed at noon on New Year's Day at the corner of Selby Avenue and Dale Street.

When Arnopoulos arrived at the intersection he was met by a line of more than 1,000 people. They had begun lining up an hour beforehand in the 16-degree temperatures.

Encouraged by the turnout and prompted by the evident need, Arnopoulos promised to return the following Wednesday. Again he was met by more than 1,000 people. He has returned to Selby and Dale every Wednesday since then to distribute

food to all comers.

Arnopoulos said he would eventually like to set up a national food collection network, and he would also like to start clothing giveaways. In the meantime, another project of his involves an attempt to provide more bed space for the homeless in St. Paul.

"The more we give away the more we get back," he said. "I love doing it. When something feels good we sometimes start to feel guilty (about it) but I like it. It's not a job; it's a joy."

Much of the food is provided by Midway area produce wholesalers, a vending company and various bakeries and grocery stores. The produce, dairy products and bakery goods they contribute are not outdated, but they do not have enough shelf life left to be marketable. For the most part, if they did not give the food to Arnopoulos it would have to be thrown out.

Arnopoulos is genuinely excited about the prospect of working with people in St. Paul. "This is what we've got to do—meet needs by doing creative things," he said. "You can do a lot with a little."

The food distribution begins at noon and lasts about an hour. More than 1,000 people, of all ages and from a widespread area, have been turning out for the weekly distribution.

PHOTOS BY THOMAS PERRY