4,500 gather together, stand thankfully in line for food

By Pat Doyle
Staff Writer

Grace Kempea stood at the end of a line that stretched nearly two blocks, waiting for a bag of free food for her husband and six children. “All of us are either on welfare or don’t have much,” Kempea said, gesturing at the crowd around her.

Disciples Ministry Church Mission in north Minneapolis.

“We figure if someone is going to help us out and feed us this Thanksgiving, we’ll wait five hours,” she said.

The line began early Wednesday and grew steadily until the church opened the doors for its fourth annual Thanksgiving food giveaway. About 2,000 people had picked up 30-pound bags of groceries by late afternoon and the church expected to distribute 2,500 more by the day’s end in the largest single food giveaway in the state.

Many of the people were elderly, some holding canes or sitting on concrete benches outside the church. Others held children in their arms or propped them on their shoulders.

Either Ruben, 72, brought a 70-year-old friend along for help in squeezing through the crowd. Last year, Ruben said, there was so many people “they pushed me right down” in the scramble for food.

William Johnson, 41, did not want to get caught in the rush. He was the first in line. He showed up at 9 a.m.

Elizabeth Nasten, 31, arrived at 8 a.m. to find hundreds of people in three hours before the doors were opened. He was told off in August from a construction job in Madison, Wis., to move to Minneapolis and has been living on welfare and looking for work. “I’ve got a wife and two kids,” he said.

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