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people each month.

To be sure, Arnoopoulos says, he still can't get other conservative churches to join his food campaign.

"On a couple of occasions, I have sent 1,900 letters to churches. These are conservative churches, and I got no response," Arnoopoulos said. "I'm telling you this: Just a little bit from each of these churches, it would be astounding what we could do."

But conservative Christian congregations have shied away from relief efforts or have operated small food shelf programs for their own members. Some will not cooperate with ecumenical organizations, such as the Minneapolis Council of Churches and Minnesota Foodshare, because of doctrinal differences. And the most conservative congregations will not even work with neighboring churches to establish food shelves or free clothing centers.

Some say conservative religious groups have started to change.

Tom Prichard, executive director of the Berean League, a non-partisan education and research organization promoting conservative Christian values, said his group wants to make an impact on

hunger.

During the past 10 years, the Berean League has focused on lobbying against pornography, abortion, homosexuals, outcome-based education, gambling and divorce. But Prichard says he senses that conservative congregations are now ready to advocate a stronger government response to poverty.

"We have not lobbied the Legislature on that issue up to now," Prichard said. "But it's something the Berean League wants to get involved in. I think we see that it is something the government doesn't have the resources to deal with. People have just thought the government will take care of it. So we dropped the ball and didn't do anything."

George Verley, executive director of the Union Gospel Mission in St. Paul, said the number of volunteers coming from conservative congregations has increased slightly in the past few years, and donations at Thanksgiving and Christmas are up. He believes the reluctance among conservative Christians to get involved may be fading.

The Rev. Peg Chamberlin, director of Minnesota Foodshare, which supplies non-perishable products to local food shelves, says support from Catholic, mainline Protestant and Jewish congregations has increased steadily. But

Food for the poor

Every Wednesday, staff and volunteers from Disciples Ministry give away food from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Selby Avenue and Victoria Street in St. Paul, and at Dupont Avenue North and 18th Avenue North in Minneapolis. Food is also available at the church building, 1000 Oliver Ave. N., Minneapolis, beginning each day at 9:30 a.m.

Families with children are offered free baby formula, milk, cereal and canned fruit to last a month. In addition, the Disciples Ministry serves about 400 breakfasts and 600 lunches each day in the church's dining hall.

the need for food still outstrips the supply.

Gary Reiersen, executive director of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, which supervises Minnesota Foodshare, said local agencies are shifting the focus of their efforts from simply providing emergency relief to working with government and public agencies.

"Religious people are still willing to do their part," Reiersen said. "But they can't do it alone. The real solutions rest with public policy."