people each month.

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

"On a couple of occasions, I have sent 1,000 letters to churches. These are conservative churches, and I got no response," Arnapolski 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 secular 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 nonpartisan 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, homosexuality, outcome-based education, gambling and divorce. But Prichard says he senses that conservative organizations are now ready to advocate a stronger government response to poverty.

"We have not lobbed 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 Verdy, 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 Chernin, director of Minnesota Foodshare, which supplies perishable products to 800 food shelves, says support from Catholics, mainline Protestant and Jewish congregations has increased steadily, but the need for food still outstrips the supply.

Gary Rotterman, 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," Rotterman said. "But they can't do it alone. The real solutions rest with public policy."