

Durenberger gives food to needy, gets helping of needed publicity

By Dane Smith
Staff Writer

U.S. Sen. Dave Durenberger showed up for volunteer work and more than a little publicity Wednesday at the Disciples Ministry Church Mission in Minneapolis, where he helped workers distribute bags of Easter holiday groceries to needy people on the North Side. Durenberger recently helped the mission's program, described by its pastor, Paul Arnopolous, as the "largest consistent bag giveaway" in the country, obtain \$20,000 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Dozens of people, some who had been waiting for hours, filed into the basement of the mission, where, under the glare of television lights and cameras, they were handed bags by Durenberger and Arnopolous. They worked for about 20 minutes before letting other volunteers take over.

Durenberger, a Republican, may face a tough re-election battle next year against DFL Attorney General Hubert Humphrey III, and Wednesday's exposure won't hurt him. He has been trying to mend fences with conservative Republicans, who are angry about his off-the-cuff criticism of President Reagan. But he also needs to maintain his traditional appeal to DFLers as a middle-of-the-roader who is sensitive to social problems. Durenberger frequently has introduced bills over the past few years dealing with rural health, environmental protection and the homeless.

Speaking to volunteers before the giveaway began, he encouraged them to ask him questions and said, "I'm real open . . . too open. I always say

what's on my mind, and it always gets me in trouble." His comment brought laughter and applause. Durenberger recently said Reagan, not terribly popular with the social welfare advocates, did not know "what the hell is going on" with the Iran-contra affair.

Arnopolous, who claimed yesterday to be a Republican, said Durenberger is the first high-ranking politician who has shown up at his ever-expanding food distribution program. He also said that "Whoever wants to come in is welcome. . . . We need all the PR we can get down here in the ghetto. A lot of times poor people are forgotten," Arnopolous said. "A U.S. senator for us is very special."

Durenberger praised the pastor and the volunteers for "moving some mountains in this neighborhood." The mission program includes a cafe on wheels for street people, a bread bus and grocery giveaway that travels to St. Paul, a daily hot-meal program serving about 250 people at the mission, a clothing giveaway and a seniors day.

Arnopolous estimated that the mission gave away 650 tons of potatoes and 338 tons of vegetables and fruit last year. Much of the food is donated, but some is bought with contributions and government grants. Durenberger's role was helpful, Arnopolous said, but "God has given me the food."