

60,000 Milwaukee children don't know where their next meal is coming from. This ministry has an answer.

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Chris Capper founded Just One More Ministry, a food rescue program, in 2010. He expects to feed 650,000 people this year with leftover food from restaurants, grocery stores, caterers and food producers. (Photo: Jeff Rumage/Now News Group)

Every day, restaurants and food service companies across the Milwaukee area dump out perfectly good food in a city where 60,000 children don't know where their next meal is coming from.

Just One More Ministry has rescued 4.8 million pounds of that food from restaurants and catering companies over the past decade.

Although it does not have the name recognition of Feeding America or Hunger Task Force, the organization has been a behind-the-scenes middle man that has distributed more than 2 million

meals to food pantries, churches and other social service organizations that serve people in need.

The number of food donations has increased by about 40% over the past three years. About 1.3 million pounds of food have been rescued this year, and Just One More Ministry founder Chris Capper expects to rescue another 350,000 pounds by the year's end.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is a serious issue in Milwaukee.

More than 60,000 children in Milwaukee don't know where their next meal is coming from. About 82% of children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch in Milwaukee public schools, according to Hunger Task Force.

Although there is no local data to gauge how much food goes to waste locally, [a 2012 report by the National Resources Defense Council](#) claims 35 million tons of food goes to waste every year in the U.S.

These losses are significant, considering one in six Americans are struggling with food insecurity. Reducing food losses by just 15% would be enough to feed more than 25 million Americans, according to the report.

Humble beginnings

Capper wasn't always passionate about food waste and food insecurity.

For 39 years, Capper was addicted to drugs and alcohol. After four stays in jail — the last one for six months — he decided to sober up and commit himself to Christianity.

Wanting to give back, he decided to start volunteering for the meal outreach ministry at St. Matthews Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa.

Inspired by the church's work, Capper decided to ask his friend's dad to donate 20 loaves of bread for a church in Milwaukee's inner city.



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He didn't know it at the time, but this would be the start of a massive food rescue operation that would quickly outgrow its 400-square-foot space in St. Matthews' basement, expanding to a 1,500-square-foot space in Redeemer Lutheran Church and then a 6,000-square-foot space in a Wauwatosa warehouse.

The organization recently moved to its largest facility yet: a 24,000-square-foot warehouse in Glendale. The new warehouse was made possible with a \$100,000 grant from Impact100 Greater Milwaukee.

Food rescue

Just One More Ministry specializes in rescuing prepared food that would have otherwise landed in the trash. Capper said there is a misconception that prepared food cannot be donated, so that food often gets wasted.

Capper was turned on to the idea of food waste one day when St. Matthews Pastor Chris Manke called him to say that Saz's planned to throw away multiple trays of food left over from a Kiwanis event it had catered.

Capper picked up the food and took it to Repairers of the Breach, a resource center for homeless adults.

Capper continued his relationship with Saz's, and continued to recruit more restaurants and caterers to the cause.

Fiserv Forum, Wisconsin State Fair Park, Johnsonville, Zilli Catering and Bartolotta Restaurant Group are among the more than 50 organizations that donate food to Just One More Ministry.

Just One More Ministry is also part of Feeding America's direct connect program, which allows it to pick up food from Walmart, Whole Foods and other grocery stores.

Some restaurants and caterers are skeptical about handing over prepared food, as they are concerned they could be held liable.

To clear up that misconception, Capper carries copies of Wisconsin's Good Samaritan Act and the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act, both of which protect organizations from food safety liability if they are donating food to charity.

Connecting with those in need

After picking up the food, Just One More Ministries sorts it into family meals for either two or four people.

The food is stored in large coolers and freezers until it is ready to be picked up by food pantries, churches and other nonprofit organizations that serve those in need.

Pathfinders, Casa Maria, UMOS and Milwaukee Rescue Mission are among the 75 organizations that pick up food from Just One More Ministry and distribute it to people in need.

The organizations that distribute the food also include a number of "mom and pop" organizations, like a woman on Locust Street who serves home-cooked meals to 300 or 400 children a week from a table in her front yard.

"We allow them to tell us what they need to serve the people, because we don't know," Capper said. "They know what people in their neighborhood are going to eat or what they need. We try to fill it as best we can."

Some organizations, like Pathfinders, were buying their own food before they were connected with Just One More Ministry's food program. Now, with the additional food donations, those organizations are able to reallocate their resources toward other services.



Whitley Willetts bags Thanksgiving meals at Just One More Ministry in Glendale on Wednesday, Nov. 27. Willetts is the head of a program that distributes food directly to those in need. (Photo: Jeff Ramage/Now News Group)

Just One More Ministry also distributes food directly to those in need — currently twice a week. On the day before Thanksgiving, for example, it handed out 150 Thanksgiving meals to people waiting on the street.

The direct outreach operation is run by Whitley Willetts, a 30-year-old single mother with two kids who has been handing out bags of extra food to friends and family members from her home.

Willetts said she hopes to eventually include a bus stop food ministry, handing out bagged lunches to people in need at bus stops.

Willetts is one of five employees at Just One More Ministry. The organization is also powered by about 40 to 50 volunteers.

To learn how to volunteer, or to donate, visit www.jomministry.org.