



# Well-Read Mom

## LEADER GUIDE

*Thank you for saying "yes" to helping women to read more and read well by leading a Well-Read Mom group.*

*We're here to help you get started and share this experience with you.*





## *Well-Read Mom's Mission*

As a leader, it is important to communicate the mission of Well-Read Mom to the members:

**Well-Read Mom accompanies women in the reading of great books and spiritual classics to encourage personal growth, friendship, and meaningful conversations in order to explore the human condition and reorient ourselves to what is good, beautiful, and true.**

In Well-Read Mom, women read more and read well. Our hope is to deepen the awareness of meaning hidden in each woman's daily life, to elevate the cultural conversation, and revitalize reading literature from books.

We choose a theme for each year and the book selections loosely correspond to that theme: mother, daughter, spouse, friend, worker, pilgrim, contemplative, artist, and sister.

### **Well-Read Mom is more than a booklist; it's an experience.**

You can find out how it all began in this [video](#) on our website.

The following pages will give you concrete tools to get started.

*"Thank you, women who are mothers . . . ! Thank you to women who are wives . . . ! Thank you, women who are daughters and women who are sisters. Thank you, women who work! Thank you, consecrated women!" In his 1995 Letter to Women, Pope John Paul II thanks women in their various capacities for their vocation and mission in the world. "Thank you, every woman, for the simple fact of being a woman! Through the insight which is so much a part of your womanhood you enrich the world's understanding and help to make human relations more honest and authentic."*

- Pope John Paul II in "Letter to Women"



# *Well-Read Mom's Method*

*We accompany each other, staying together in our reading. In the local groups we read, compare and share literature that helps us explore the human condition and re-orient us to the good, the beautiful, and the true on our journey.*

More about our method:

**Accompany:** As we accompany one another, there is accountability, support, and a sense of belonging that helps to foster the habit of regular reading. Staying on pace together, reading the same books across the nation, facilitates awareness of a wider and deeper cultural conversation.

**Read:** We give ourselves permission to find time and space to read the selected literature, allowing it to penetrate our mind and heart.

**Compare:** We enter into the drama of the story, and examine our own questions as they come forth, asking “What does this mean for my life?”

**Share:** We first listen to the WRM prepared monthly audio, and then discuss the book, offering something of ourselves through sharing personal insights and experiences, as well as conversation and questions that arise from the text.



# Getting Started

*As an official Well-Read Mom leader, you are asked to:*

- INVITE the women into this experience of friendship and organize the details of the meetings.
- CLEARLY PROPOSE the model of Well-Read Mom which invites women to explore the annual theme through monthly reading selections.
- CONNECT the women to the broader Well-Read Mom experience by utilizing our monthly audios and printed materials.
- FOSTER FRIENDSHIP among the women by facilitating the group in a way that encourages respectful and thoughtful dialogue.



# *How To Begin: Inviting the Women*

To begin, simply brainstorm women to invite. These could be relatives, fellow moms, neighbors, teachers, coaches, co-workers, etc. Women can be of any age and stage in life. We understand "motherhood" in the broadest sense, as the generative capacity of all women. Take a risk and put the invitation out there. Don't be afraid of rejection. Even having a handful of women can make for a wonderful experience.

If you've been meeting already, consider whether the group is growing too large and may need to split. Sometimes this happens naturally by adding a second date or time. At times, a woman may volunteer to lead a branch of the group. Or, if you need assistance growing your group, please contact us. We're happy to help.

Another idea is to invite a friend or two to read along with you as an "accountability partner". You could discuss the books in person, via phone or video call. This can be your small group experience. Groups can be any size. We've found 8-12 women to be a nice size.

## **Publicizing your group**

Use our [customizable flyer](#) to spread the word about your group. You can edit the PDF or download and write in the details about your group. You can distribute the flyer via email, print it and hand it out to women who may be interested, or even post it on social media. Or, print or email our [brochure](#) to share more about WRM.

Here is a sample announcement used in a community bulletin to advertise a group:

### *Well-Read Mom Group Forming Now*

*You are invited to come and learn about a local Well-Read Mom small group forming in this area.*

*Well-Read Mom (WRM) is a way for women to reclaim time to read the best. The goal is to provide a way for women to read high-quality literature together and grow in friendship in the process. Our groups are open to women at all stages of life.*

*WRM groups read one book per month and meet to discuss once a month. Our year together includes great books, spiritual classics (during Advent and Lent), and worthy reads that explore the human condition and reorient us to what is good, true, and beautiful.*

*Find out more at (time) and (place). Contact (leader) at (phone) for more information or visit [wellreadmom.com](http://wellreadmom.com) to find out more.*



## ***Use the Well-Read Mom Find a Group Directory***

Well-Read Mom's group directory allows other members to search for open groups or women who are reading on their own. Leaders designate their groups as "open" or "closed" to Well-Read Moms from the general public. Potential members looking to join a group can send leaders an inquiry. No mailing address or emails are viewable to the public.

The feature is also helpful if local groups want to work together to host regional events or an occasional joint meeting.

## ***Schedule an interest meeting***

A non-threatening first step is to invite the women to a brief interest meeting (45 minutes) to find out more about Well-Read Mom and how they can become involved. Maybe you've found women who want to read every selection, or maybe you want to tackle a handful of books this year. *Remember, the goal is simply to read more and read well.* You can find an agenda with links to the resources [here](#).





Well-Read Mom began when founder Marcie Stokman gathered 20 women in her living room in Crosby, MN in 2012. Today there are more than 400 women-led, women-run groups across the United States and abroad.

**There's only one rule in Well-Read Mom - Don't apologize if you don't finish the reading. Our goal is to help women read more, read well.** That said, it's hard to have a discussion if no one has read, so discuss group expectations with one another!

Do attend the meetings - even if you haven't finished the book and soak up the conversation. You may be inspired to go home and pick up that book.

The goal is to read more. If you can't read every pick, select those you do want to try. (For some of the more challenging books, our Well-Read Mom *Reading Companion* has tips on what to read if you can't read the whole book.)

Each meeting discusses the book from the previous month. For example, during the October meeting, the September book selection is discussed, and so on. You can find a chart of what to read when [here](#). (This also shows if there is a recommended edition or translation of the book.)

The audios are posted by the last Monday of the previous month. (The [audios](#) are posted on the "Monthly Audio" page of the website and we notify our members when the audios are up.) When you register, you can also choose to have these audios texted directly to your smartphone.

Our books link to Bookshop.org or the publisher for purchasing. We have partnered with Bookshop.org as a way to support local bookstores and Well-Read Mom at the same time. Please note that Well-Read Mom has affiliate relationships with Bookshop.org and The Word Among Us. We will earn a commission if you click through and make a purchase.

Spread the word to your friends and family. It's never too late to join a group. Women can search for a group on our website or follow on their own. We are proud to be an official 501c3 non-profit organization. We are grateful for tax-deductible [donations](#) in any amount.



We want all women who participate in Well-Read Mom to enjoy our beautiful materials. When you join WRM, you're not just purchasing a product, you're joining and supporting a movement of women who want to read more and read well.

Because we are funded through membership, we ask that each woman that participates purchase her own materials. The membership cost covers most of the expenses in running Well-Read Mom. As a leader, we ask you to relay the membership requirement to your participants. (If you need assistance with this, please don't hesitate to ask.)

Using the materials makes it easy to be part of a group. Women who consistently use the materials tell us they have a richer experience of Well-Read Mom and are more connected to our mission.

### ***Explain how women order the materials***

Once you have registered as a leader, we will send you materials to forward to your potential group members so that they can purchase their materials and access the resources.

All of the Well-Read Mom materials are copyrighted. There is no duplicating or sharing of materials allowed. Well-Read Mom requires that each woman purchase her own materials, and as such we do not permit the sharing of study materials (such as two women sharing the *Reading Companion* or sharing website usernames and passwords).



## ***Member materials include:***

**The Reading Companion** - enhanced workbook format. Includes author biographies, discussion questions, literary criticism, a reading log, and space to record your personal reflections.

The **monthly audio resources** enrich your reading and group discussion. Audios include an introduction to each book that explains why it was chosen and what to look for in your reading. (Even if you miss the meeting, all members have access to listen to the audios on their own.)

**Ongoing access to members-only features** and bonus materials; interviews, articles, and videos to help us go deeper into the year's selections.

Inspiring and encouraging **members-only podcasts** on our favorite themes: restorative leisure, nurturing a mother's heart, how to find more time to read, and the relationship between reading great books and affecting a culture change.

A **beautiful bookmark** with the year's artwork and booklist

Access to ten years worth of **Well-Read Mom's themes and booklists**

**Optional text messages** notifications to your phone to help you access the monthly audios and podcasts

Membership costs less than \$4 a month. The more women that register, the more the costs of running a non-profit are spread out among many women. Membership funds pay for website design, database and email services, printing, mailing, part-time staffing, and other business expenses.

## *Next Step:* *Propose the Monthly Meetings*

The resources are created for groups to meet monthly. The kick-off for the year happens in September, and there is a selection for each month thereafter. Women come to the first meeting in September without reading anything in advance. The reading for the September meeting is read at the meeting and can be found in the *Well-Read Mom Reading Companion*.



Sometimes, the more difficult reads go for two months. During the summer months, optional Well-Read Mom reads are proposed. A group may take the opportunity to read a book from a previous Well-Read Mom theme, a book of their choice, or simply take a break.

### ***Consider places to meet***

Brainstorm a potential location for the meeting that is open and accessible for as many people as possible; this could be a home, church, coffee shop, community center, restaurant, etc. You can also rotate locations, for example, members' homes. You'll want to arrange the meeting room so members face each other in a circle or semicircle to create an open environment. Make sure the room is equipped with what you'll need (sufficient seating, ability to play the audios, etc.)

We recommend keeping the meeting simple so that hosting does not become an obstacle to meeting regularly (although some groups love to host book-themed meals!). You can offer a pot of tea or coffee. Another member could sign up to bring cookies. Rotate the meeting place as needed.

### ***How long are the meetings?***

Generally, meetings last a little over an hour. We recommend that you run a timely meeting and then visit afterward if you like. This gives women the freedom to just attend the meeting. The meeting is normally a great springboard for continued conversation.

# Monthly Meeting Format

Each monthly meeting follows the same general format.

## *First audio*

After welcoming the women, the leader plays the first recording; a candid, encouraging reflection that helps focus the group, jog the women's memories on the reading, and launch the discussion.

**Listening to the audios together when you gather as a group is vitally important to the Well-Read Mom experience.** We find those who intend to listen on their own before or after the meeting seldom do and are less connected to the mission of Well-Read Mom.

Before your meeting starts, find the audios on the [Monthly Audio](#) page of our website. You'll want to make sure you have Internet access at your meeting spot to listen to the audio and watch an occasional video together. If you won't have Internet access, please download the material before your meeting.

## *Initial impressions and discussion*

Next, we recommend an initial go-around where each woman offers a brief impression, question, or reflection from her experience of the book (women are free to pass). We have found this initial round generates discussion and allows each woman the chance to share her thoughts.

Additional reflection questions can be found in the *Reading Companion*. (Or, feel free to use your own questions.) This is also a good time for each woman to share a favorite quote, burning question, or what she gained from the reading.

## *Second audio*

Toward the end of your discussion, play the second audio. This one introduces the upcoming month's book pick. The audios explain why the book was chosen, the connection to the year's theme, and what to keep in mind while reading.



## ***Closing Your Meeting***

Wrap up the official meeting by reminding the women when and where you will meet next. Keeping the schedule consistent (rather than searching for an "open" night each month) simplifies the scheduling of the meetings. This is also a good time to collect addresses and phone numbers. If time allows, invite the women to continue on in conversation.

### *Sample Meeting Schedule*

7:00-7:10 Women gather, get a cup of tea, and settle in.

7:10-7:15 Leader plays the first recording.

7:15-8:00 Group discussion.

8:00-8:15 Leader plays the second recording. Women often continue with a social time after the "official" part of the meeting has concluded.

*Happy reading!*

Thanks again for your yes to leading or participating in a group. We are amazed at how women are responding to this initiative. If you have any questions or need assistance, please email us at [info@wellreadmom.com](mailto:info@wellreadmom.com).

# *Frequently Asked Questions by Readers*

Why follow the theme and proposed order of books?

We have Well-Read Mom groups in every state and several countries. One of the most beautiful aspects of Well-Read Mom is that women all over the world are reading together the same book at the same time. Following a theme and the order of the books is unique to the Well-Read Mom method of reading books together. The national conversation is possible when we stay together in this way.

Can we use our own discussion questions?

Yes, the discussion questions are a starting point for your group. If you have written your questions, by all means, feel free to use them. Our questions are written by a variety of women, so the style varies from month to month - some focus more on book analysis, and others toward personal reflection.

Why do you ask members to commit to reading Well-Read Mom emails?

Communicating with members all over the country is difficult. Most women experience Well-Read Mom as their local group; however, the Well-Read Mom experience is also national! Our emails alert you to when resources are available, where to find a book that is low stock, any programmatic changes that may be happening, announcement special events, and more. We know you're busy; we try to limit the number of emails we send to our members.

How do I close my group if it is getting too big?

The group leader should log-on to her member account and select "full" under group status. When a group is getting too big, sometimes the group splits in two. Other times, one leader will run two groups. Each group decides its capacity.

Does my group have to be open to the public?

No, sometimes a group is listed as "closed" due to space where it meets or the comfort level of the group members, and this is just fine.

How can I grow my group if it is too small?

You can consider hosting an informational meeting, inviting other parents, relatives, coaches, and friends. Another idea is to ask a friend to be your accountability partner for reading. We can also publicize your group on social media.

The women don't seem committed. How can I increase group participation?

We have found that when women register they are more committed to attending the meetings. Our leaders tell us that they have more success when they choose the dates for the whole year in late summer. That way, women can save the date. It seems impossible to find a date that "works for everyone" month-by-month. There are very few evenings that women would have no other potential commitments, so we encourage the women to make this self-care time for personal growth and friendship a priority,

How do I manage someone who dominates the discussion?

Sometimes a simple, "We'd love to hear more about that. Can you tell us more after the meeting? Or, "Can we hear from anyone else that hasn't had the chance to share yet?" Or, passing an object that shows who has "the floor" can help curtail someone who is dominating the discussion.

It's awkward to ask group members to register. What should I do?

As a leader, it can be a bit awkward to tell the women that they need to register. However, it's so important to us as a non-profit that women who benefit from this ministry financially support it. Unfortunately, too many women take advantage of the experience without registering, which is challenges Well-Read Mom's feasibility. If you prefer, the home office can let the women know about the registration requirement.

When women understand that Well-Read Mom is a non-profit funded by the membership dues of women that participate, it is easier to register. There are many reading lists available online, but Well-Read Mom is an experience. Membership costs less than \$4 a month.

Since Well-Read Mom's founding in 2012, Marcie Stokman has donated 100% of the time she gives to Well-Read Mom. However, there are business expenses in running a non-profit such as rent, utilities, legal fees, insurance, etc. Membership fees, grants, and donations all keep Well-Read Mom running.

Just to be clear, no woman is turned away due to an inability to pay. Thankfully, we are able to give scholarships. Having an accurate count of the women who participate also helps us as we apply for grants.

How can I ask women to not drop in and out of meetings?

You can reiterate that to have the kind of deep conversation that Well-Read Mom promotes, you ask that women attend the whole meeting so that those relationships have time to develop.



How can I contribute commentary or blog posts to Well-Read Mom?

We welcome your contributions to our blog. Submissions should focus on your experience of Well-Read Mom, literature, or how a certain book has influenced you. Please contact us at [info@wellreadmom.com](mailto:info@wellreadmom.com).

How do we best use the monthly audios?

The audios are important to understanding why the book was selected, how it applies to the year's theme and often provides literary information that helps enrich the reading.

By listening to the audio, Well-Read Mom will be "at its core" a similar experience for every woman who joins. Each group will have their dynamics and flavor, but if someone was to join a group in Crosby, Minnesota, or Houston, Texas her experience of Well-Read Mom will be essentially the same in its basic structure. The Well-Read Mom experience is bigger than each local small group. Your participation in Well-Read Mom is influencing culture. We have seen evidence of this all over the country in a multitude of ways.

We have also asked all women to listen to the audios for a very business-related reason. Over the past few years, we have found it increasingly difficult to communicate and connect with our members. Email open rates and communicating important information from Well-Read Mom to each member is challenging. We hope that by asking you to commit to listening to the audios each month, we will be able to share the most important information with you via that route. On our end, we promise to be respectful of your time. We understand how fruitful your group discussions are. It is our great hope that you will find that listening to the audios each month becomes a source of uniting your group to women all over the world and that they might inspire you to explore a new component of the reading selection that you may have overlooked.

We recommend using the audio to launch your meeting and close your meeting. That way, your discussion is not interrupted. Using the audios also makes it easy for someone to step in and lead the group with virtually little preparation.

*We are sincerely grateful for all of the women who are joining us on this amazing journey. We appreciate our leaders and the unique role they have taken. We want to do our best to ensure that Well-Read Mom can help women read more and read well for a long time to come.*

You can find more member-related FAQs [here](#).

