

Well-Read Mom

Read more. Read well.



RECLAIM TIME FOR READING & FRIENDSHIP TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEART AN INVITATION FROM WELL-READ MOM

The Story of
Well-Read Mom

p. 3

The Criteria for
a Well-Read Mom book

p. 6

How to Get Started with
Well-Read Mom

p. 10

Take Care of Your Heart

RECLAIM TIME FOR READING & FRIENDSHIP AN INVITATION FROM WELL-READ MOM

It can be a challenge to make time to read in a world that never stops. Developing and maintaining the ability for deep reading isn't something we can take for granted. Millions of Americans won't read a single book this year. Don't let yourself be one of them.



WHAT WE DO:

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

OUR BOOKLIST:

We read books that encourage, enlighten, and motivate us to dive deeper into the plots of our own lives. Great writers become dear friends, and we find ourselves seeing reality through their eyes, imbued with their insights.

FIND YOUR COMMUNITY:

Join an existing group, start a group, or, if you're not ready for a small-group experience, read along with a friend. As we accompany one another, there is accountability, support, and a sense of belonging that helps to foster the habit of regular reading.

Let Well-Read Mom help you form beautiful friendships.

A PLAN THAT WORKS:

There is no "failing" when you join Well-Read Mom. With our tips, support, and accountability, you'll read more and read well—whether that means finishing a heavy-hitter like *Crime and Punishment*, or a few pages of a classic work like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We meet you where you're at.



wellreadmom.com

READ MORE. READ WELL.

The Story of Well-Read Mom

By Marcie Stokman, Founder of Well-Read Mom.

Well-Read Mom began when my daughter, a new mom at the time, called me, expressing her loneliness and desire to meet with other women in a meaningful way. I heard a cry in her voice. At that time, I was aware of how my own reading had declined, but I also realized that after years of managing a busy house of nine people, I was a happier and better woman, wife, and mother when I was reading good books. Our desires merged, and Well-Read Mom was born.

Since then, many women have joined us to read more, read well, and grow in friendship. The books they read encourage personal growth, friendship, and meaningful conversation. What started from a desire and longing of mothers to meet with other women in a meaningful, fun way has turned into a cultural force that encourages women to explore the human condition and reorient themselves to what is good, beautiful, and true.

My passion for promoting reading literature has not waned over the years; it has only grown. As the number of women accompanying one another in groups across the nation increases, there is the possibility of a cultural impact. When women read more, everyone reads more: spouses, friends, neighbors, and, most importantly, children. Parents who model reading at home are more likely to raise children who read, and this skill is necessary for maintaining a civil society. Dana Gioia, former head of the National Endowment for the Arts, wrote, "Reading is not a timeless, universal capability. Advanced literacy is a specific intellectual skill and social habit that depends on a great many educational, cultural, and economic factors. As more Americans lose this capability, our nation becomes less informed, active, and independent-minded. These are not the qualities that a free, innovative, or productive society can afford to lose."

Today, books from our tradition are being pushed aside for more contemporary works, or people ignore literature altogether because they think it's irrelevant. In addition to that, reading from print is falling by the wayside. It's becoming harder to garner the necessary focus and attention for sustained reading. The women who participate in Well-Read Mom believe that literature is nourishment for human development and desire to continue educating their hearts, minds, and imaginations so that they are more aware of the meaning and beauty present in their daily lives.



Authors of the NEA Reading at Risk report, "Literary reading strongly correlates to other forms of active civic participation...If one believes that active and engaged readers lead richer intellectual lives than non-readers and that a well-read citizenry is essential to a vibrant democracy, the decline of literary reading calls for serious action." The report concludes that the trends in reading among all demographic groups in America, especially the young, indicate "an imminent cultural crisis."

I believe Well-Read Mom is an attempt to respond to this cultural crisis. In his famous work *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre writes, "...for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us."

In our media-driven age, my conviction is that reading books is not a skill we can afford to lose; instead, we must fight to preserve this ability. Well-Read Mom is a grassroots effort to promote reading, and it is working!

Since its inception in 2012, thousands of women have read and discussed great and worthy books together. Thousands of friends, neighbors, relatives, and most importantly, children have been impacted as well. Together we can work to keep the flame of reading alive in our culture.

With gratitude,

Marcie Stokman



Well-Read Mom

MISSION, METHOD, & VISION

It is the **Well-Read Mom mission** is to accompany 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.

The **Well-Read Mom method** is that women stay together in the reading as we compare and share literature.

- **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 and 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 minds and hearts.
- **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 Well-Read Mom prepared monthly audio and then discuss the book, offering something of ourselves through sharing personal insights and experiences, along with conversation and questions that arise from the text.

It is **our vision** that 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, elevate the cultural conversation, and revitalize reading literature from books.

Our goals are:

- To suggest works of literature that encourage women to grow intellectually, spiritually, and personally through deepened thought and conversation.
- To foster meaningful friendship among women and thus to counteract the increasing isolation characteristic of our culture.
- To deepen awareness of the immensity of meaning hidden in each woman’s daily life.
- To build community locally and nationally through meetings and Well-Read Mom events.
- To provide original resource materials that illuminate the literature through the lens of Catholic tradition.
- To encourage intentional family life, reading in the home, and all mothers’ awareness of their unique presence in the heart of the family.

Thank You Women...

EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO WOMEN (1995)

This "dialogue" really needs to begin with a word of thanks. As I wrote in my Apostolic *Letter Mulieris Dignitatem*, the Church "desires to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for the 'mystery of woman' and for every woman—for all that constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the 'great works of God', which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her" (No. 31). This word of thanks to the Lord for his mysterious plan regarding the vocation and mission of women in the world is at the same time a concrete and direct word of thanks to women, to every woman, for all that they represent in the life of humanity.

Thank you, women who are mothers!

You have sheltered human beings within yourselves in a unique experience of joy and travail. This experience makes you become God's own smile upon the newborn child, the one who guides your child's first steps, who helps it to grow, and who is the anchor as the child makes its way along the journey of life.

Thank you, women who are wives!

You irrevocably join your future to that of your husbands, in a relationship of mutual giving, at the service of love and life.

Thank you, women who are daughters and women who are sisters!

Into the heart of the family, and then of all society, you bring the richness of your sensitivity, your intuitiveness, your generosity, and your fidelity.

Thank you, women who work!

You are present and active in every area of life—social, economic, cultural, artistic, and political. In this way, you make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture, which unites reason and feeling to a model of life ever open to the sense of "mystery", and to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity.

Thank you, consecrated women!

Following the example of the greatest of women, the Mother of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, you open yourselves with obedience and fidelity to the gift of God's love. You help the Church and all mankind to experience a "spousal" relationship to God, one which magnificently expresses the fellowship which God wishes to establish with his creatures.

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.

Here I would like to express particular appreciation to those women who are involved in the various areas of education extending well beyond the family: nurseries, schools, universities, social service agencies, parishes, associations, and movements. Wherever the work of education is called for, we can note that women are ever ready and willing to give themselves generously to others, especially in serving the weakest and most defenseless. In this work, they exhibit a kind of affective, cultural, and spiritual motherhood, which has inestimable value for the development of individuals and the future of society.



Book Selection

WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR WELL-READ MOM BOOKS?

Life is busy! For many women, mothers, in particular, personal reading is often viewed as a luxury that gets sacrificed to the busyness of daily life. So when we do make time to read, we want to be sure that we are participating in something good and beautiful. We desire to actively engage in an activity that seeks to open our moral imagination and lead us to truth. But what does this mean? How do we know what books might fall into these categories and how can characters that seem to live lives that are anything but beautiful lead us to deep abiding truth?

Well-Read Mom has spent a great deal of time thinking about this and would like to share what we look for in our book selections with you.

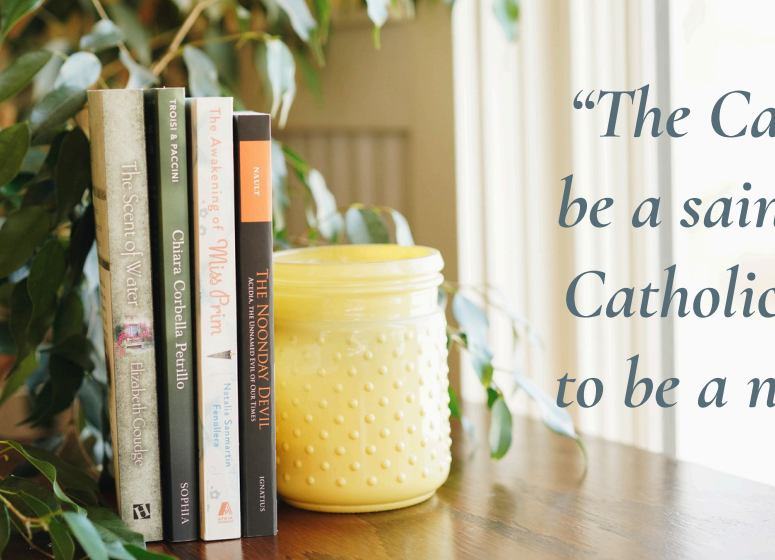
We look for tradition.

All around us, books that have **traditionally** been considered valuable and worth reading are being dismissed and replaced with other (often more contemporary) books of questionable quality. At Well-Read Mom, we lean against this trend. Instead, we rely in great part upon “classic” books—“classic” understood in the broadest sense possible: books which tradition, great literary thinkers throughout the ages, and time itself, have all elected as stand-out examples of literary excellence.

We look for humanity.

We also seek to read **contemporary books** that illuminate the **human in some important way**. We’re reading books that ask the questions enduring classics have asked for millennia: What is it to be human? What are a human person’s most fundamental needs? How do we live in a fallen world? How do we cope with death? What gives life meaning?





“The Catholic novelist doesn’t have to be a saint; he doesn’t even have to be a Catholic; he does, unfortunately, have to be a novelist.” – Flannery O'Connor

We look as art.

We ask ourselves, is it possible to interact with books that stretch us outside our comfort zone; books that include objectionable content, written by authors whose world-view, behavior, or experiences may at times diverge from what is virtuous and moral?

In her wry way, Flannery O'Connor notes that the artistic quality of a book—its integrity as art per se and its literary value—is separate from the author's faith and virtue (or lack thereof). The fictional novel (or short story, or drama) is a unique creation, distinct from catechesis and apologetics. O'Connor explains, "For the fiction writer himself, the whole story is the meaning because it is an experience, not an abstraction."

In fiction, meaning becomes incarnate via the complex tapestry of character, plot, theme, language, and setting. In this vein, Well-Read Mom hopes to challenge women to experience literature that has integrity as meaningful, worthwhile art.

Pope St. John Paul II knew, from his own experience, that art has the potential to both reveal and inhabit the deepest parts of the human person—regions both resplendent and shadowed. Through art, we have a mediated way to confront those shadows, to begin to understand such struggles within ourselves, and to empathize with those who struggle with darkness and sin.

What is more, confronting these situations via literature in a way that is slower than our day-to-day interactions

with the world at large, gives us more room for contemplation and more time to consider how Christ brings to such situations both a challenge to live out virtue and an expanse of mercy that can embrace and forgive even the most piercing sins.

“Even beyond its typically religious expressions, true art has a close affinity with the world of faith, so that, even in situations where culture and the Church are far apart, art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience ... Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.” —Pope St. John Paul II

We look into the paradox.

The list of important, meaningful great books that have been censured goes on and on: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Animal Farm*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and more. *Little Women* faced critics who thought it was immoral. Christian magazines told Sunday school librarians not to buy the book—the March family doesn't go to church on Christmas Day. If we closed ourselves off from every work of literature that mentioned sin or scandal, we'd even have to eliminate the Holy Bible, which features murder, suicide, adultery, and worse.

Literature reveals the paradoxical tension of the world to us: we live in a world that is both a “vale of tears” and a wellspring of God's graces that are bestowed at times through the most surprising situations and people. We strive, love, and suffer in this world, yet always long for heaven; while “in” the world,

but not “of” it, we must, like the saints, enter into its battered beauty, knowing that God's good will triumph even in the midst of all this, and not in some imaginary land-without-sin that is not our own.

At the same time, it is important to realize we do not encourage reading books that glamorize evil or fail to see evil as evil. Dorian Gray, for example, is no moral exemplar. Still, throughout the novel, the narrator pushes us as readers to recognize how even Dorian's life, as dark as it was, could have been redeemed had he chosen to accept God's mercy or recognized his need for salvation.

IF IT IS APPROPRIATE TO READ THESE BOOKS, HOW SHOULD WE READ THEM?

We read with humility.

It is important to note the words “work of art” in the above suggestion from C.S. Lewis. He is not referring to fluff, smut, or worse—he's referring to a creation that has integrity within itself as art. To accept the work as it is, we may be challenged to visit or inhabit realms that are less comfortable for us. We must read from a position of humility rather than a position of judgmental suspicion.

There is a commonsense caveat to the surrender suggested by Lewis, of course. If, due to some particular vulnerability or wound, a reader can tell that a specific work of literature might be spiritually harmful to herself, she can, with proper self-knowledge and discernment, elect not to engage in this particular book. Her experience is valid, but it does not invalidate the importance of the experience of this work of art for others.



“The first demand
a work of art
makes upon us is
surrender. Look.
Listen. Receive.
Get yourself out
of the way.
(There is no good
asking first
whether the work
before you
deserves such a
surrender, for
until you have
surrendered you
cannot possibly
find out.)
-C. S. Lewis

We read with confidence.

In Well-Read Mom, we have a particular method for reading books: read, compare, share, and accompany. We read the story that is given to us. We compare this story against our own life experiences. Often in discussions, new ideas or insights will be shared and explored that make us see the work in an entirely new way. This is a valuable enterprise! Through community, we are supported as we enter into the experience in a deeper way. Then, we accompany each other—we help each other live the new experience we have been given.

It is crucial for women to be educated deeply in what it is to be human. At times, this may mean staring evil in the face, as we did in “*The Picture of Dorian Gray*.” We do this not because Dorian is an exemplar of human behavior but to recognize how sin distorts humanity. We need to see. We need to look at humanity's terrible distortions head-on to be able to see ourselves more clearly. If we cannot see how distorted we all have become, we will never be able to enter into the mystery of the Prodigal Son and Father. We cannot, in truth, beg to rest our head on the Father's breast as the tattered, repentant sinner we know we are.

In Well-Read Mom, we hope to deeply read human works of literature without fear and challenge ourselves to stand before reality without editing anything away. At times, we are called to witness the terrible reality of a life lived without Christ—not to glorify sin, but to illuminate our deepest need and to see how deeply we require a savior to enter into all of our lives. Salvation through Christ's love is possible when one first recognizes a need for it.

We read with honesty.

The books we read with Well-Read Mom challenge us to stand before reality without editing anything away. The wounds of Christ remained in his risen body, allowing his glorified body to bear the marks of the brokenness which expressed his love. The books we read bear the wounds of the world, that we might enter into them and discover our brokenness and that of others because such knowledge is the gateway to God's mercy.

At Well-Read Mom, we do not seek to read works that glorify a sinful life, but rather ones that illuminate our deepest need, our need for a savior to enter into our lives and claim it. Just as Christ didn't turn away from the wounded Samaritan woman at the well, knowing well the scandalous behavior that shadowed her past and her present, we cannot circle our wagons of virtue and close ourselves off from the world's flaws—primarily because the most pernicious brokenness dwells not outside our front door, but within the home of our hearts.

In Well-Read Mom, women read more and read well. We desire to deepen the awareness of meaning hidden in each woman's daily life, elevate the cultural conversation, and revitalize reading literature from books. If you would like to have us help you select worthy reading material, we invite you to join and read along with us. We are better together!

"The educational method with the greatest capacity for good is not the one that flees from reality in order to affirm what is good separately, but rather the one that lives by advocating for the triumph of good in the world."

—Servant of God, Luigi Giussani



"A wound, if you think about it, is an occasion when what is within us is exposed, when the life-blood is poured out and becomes accessible to others. In Christ's case, what is within him is love, the Holy Spirit. The places where human sins inflicted pain on him are the very places where, because that pain was accepted on our behalf and for our sake, Christ's love was most fully expressed."

—Stratford Caldecott

Make the Commitment to Reclaim Time for Reading & Friendship

FIND OUT MORE AT WELLREADMOM.COM

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.

Our book selections for each year correspond to a theme of a woman's life; such as: mother, daughter, sister, friend, worker, pilgrim, contemplative, artist, sister, family, giver, seeker, and father.

"Women will increasingly play a part in the solution of the serious problems of the future: leisure time, the quality of life, migration, social services, euthanasia, drugs, health care, the ecology, etc.

In all these areas, a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable, for it will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favors the processes of humanization which mark the "civilization of love'."

- St. John Paul II

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

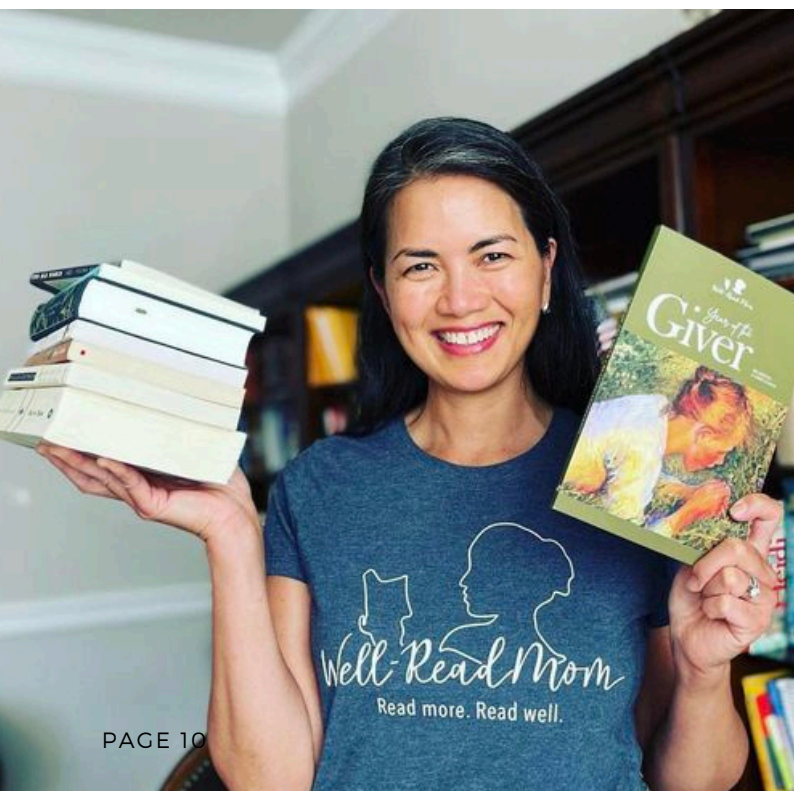
We want all women who participate in Well-Read Mom to enjoy our beautiful materials. When you join Well-Read Mom, you're not just purchasing a product. You are joining and supporting a movement of women who want to read more and read well!

For this reason, we are asking each woman who participates in a group to register with Well-Read Mom officially.

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



Scan the QR code to find out more about membership and registration.



Well-Read Mom has Great Resources

The Reading Companion

A great resource to accompany your reading. The *Reading Companion* includes: author biographies, book reflections, discussion questions, literary analysis, and space to record your favorite quotes, questions, and notes from your meeting.

Monthly Audio Resources

Each month, Well-Read Mom provides two audio reflections to open and close your group meeting. These audios deepen your reading experience by introducing each book, sharing why it was chosen, and highlighting key themes to look for. If you miss a meeting, don't worry—every member can listen anytime.

Exclusive Deep Dive Interviews

Inspiring and encouraging interviews with authors, professors, and industry experts help us dive deeper as we discuss the books for the year and other relevant topics.

Beautiful Bookmark

When you become a member, you will receive a bookmark with the year's artwork and booklist.

Summer Magazine

A beautiful, full-color magazine filled with member reflections, feature articles on reading, motherhood, leisure, culture, and a preview of the membership year to come!

Access to our Family Supplement

Our *Family Supplement* pairs beloved children's books with the themes you're exploring in your Well-Read Mom group, helping you share meaningful stories with the young people in your life. Thoughtfully curated for younger and middle-school readers, these selections invite the whole family into the joy of reading together.

Access to Previous Years' Themes and Booklists

If you're looking for more great and worthy books to read, you can find them in our past years' reading lists.

Optional Text Message Notifications

All members have the choice to receive notifications about monthly audios and interviews to your phone via SMS.



Well-Read Mom

INVITES YOU TO

Join Us

“Well-Read Mom takes the guesswork out of what to read and shares tips to make reading possible—even when the kids are young.”

— Lisa (Well-Read Mom Member)

Well-Read Mom is a 501(c)3 non-profit. As such, all of our funds are provided through membership fees, donations, and grants. Therefore, each woman who participates in a local small group should join the Well-Read Mom organization. Your membership dollars enable the work we do, the connections we build, the growth we experience, and the impact we are having on culture.

WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER.

When a woman joins Well-Read Mom, she is not just purchasing a booklist or product; she is joining and supporting a movement of women who want to read more and read well. We are so proud that we are a part of deepening the awareness of meaning in women's daily lives, elevating the cultural conversation, and revitalizing the reading of literature. Well-Read Mom couldn't exist without the financial support our members provide. We are proud to say that, due to the generosity of our members, no woman is turned away due to financial need.

READY TO BEGIN? HERE IS HOW TO GET STARTED:

01

Register Online

When you register, you'll be able to identify yourself as a leader and designate your group as “open” or “closed” to new members. Within 48 hours, your name will be on our Leader List, and new group members can select you as their leader.

02

Invite Your Friends

These could be relatives, moms, neighbors, teachers, 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.

Use our customizable flyer, brochures, and registration forms on the Leader Resources page of our website to invite your friends. Take a risk! Even a handful of women can make for a wonderful experience.

03

Access Our Materials

After you register and pay the membership fee, you'll have immediate access to our online materials, including our current and past booklists, monthly audios, and interviews. We'll mail your printed materials beginning in early August for the membership year starting in September and within 7-10 business days for anyone who joins during the year.



Scan the QR code to register.