



CHAPTER TEN

The Missional Mom Needs Missional Community (... and Vice Versa)

*If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.*

AFRICAN PROVERB¹

When I was a graduate student at Wheaton College, I was part of the residence hall staff, and so I had to go to Honey-Rock Camp in the north woods of Wisconsin for a week of before-school bonding and team building with other staff members. I have to confess, I am not much of a camper. Once we arrived, my introverted self longed to be back in my climate-controlled apartment with indoor plumbing, and I felt out of place with the rest

of my team. But then came the day we were to work through the ropes course together. A ropes course is a series of outdoor activities intended to be extremely challenging so that groups will



develop teamwork and camaraderie. That sounded good in theory, until I saw The Wall. The Wall was simply a fifteen-foot tall wooden structure with a completely straight face and nothing protruding or available to hold on to. Our job was simple: using nothing but our own bodies, to get every member of our team up and over that wall,

and to do it within fifteen minutes.²

On my own, there was absolutely no way I could have scaled that wall. None whatsoever. But that was, of course, the beauty of the assignment: it forced us to work in close partnership with our teammates to achieve the goal. When it was my turn to scale The Wall, I had teammates hoisting me up then pushing me from underneath, as well as people pulling me from above, while I did what I could by bracing my feet and scaling the face of the slippery wooden surface. When the last person had made it up and over, within the time limit, we were buoyed by what we had done. Banding together to work toward a seemingly impossible goal creates a sense of community that would not exist otherwise. I learned a critical lesson that day: when the task seems immeasurable, it's not just good but necessary to be in partnership with others.

The necessity for partnership is also true for missional moms, because living missionally can be an almost impossible task in our contemporary culture. It is much easier to be missional when you're in community with other mission-minded people. In this chapter, we'll look at the ways missional moms encourage and support one

another in their efforts to live in a countercultural way. We'll also find out from a number of today's missional church leaders what qualities distinguish these types of communities. We'll even address the question, "What do I do if I am *not* a part of a missional community?" The answer may very well surprise you.

MISSIONAL MOMS NEED OTHER MISSIONAL MOMS

Scaling The Wall was only possible because my teammates and I were all moving the same direction; it would have been extremely difficult to achieve our goal if someone had been pulling us the other way. Similarly, missional moms find that having the support of like-minded missional moms is crucial in helping them move in a missional direction. Remember the three missional moms from Southern California? Rachel VerWys, Katy White, and Tonya Herman share longstanding friendships that help support them in missional living. Katy says, "I definitely favor, prefer, and feel much more at home with moms who are also missional. Friends who are really missional like Tonya and Rachel are essential for me, and I might burn out faster without them."

Rachel and Katy have been accountability partners who, for the past nine years, have continually asked themselves challenging questions to make sure their priorities are in line with what God would want for them. Rachel says, "I value our friendship deeply because of our similar passions and callings. Katy has encouraged me, supported me, and pushed me to become more holy and love Jesus and others well. Being missional is not a life one lives apart from community, and Katy is an integral part to sustaining a missional heart for me."

"In many ways, I think the number one driver of our friendship is the mutual desire to stay missional: to encourage each other to truly follow Jesus—as wives, as parents, as volunteers or workers in ministry, and as advocates for justice, mercy, and health

in our world, communities, families, and selves,” Katy adds.

Here in Chicagoland, I met with another pair of women whose friendship demonstrates how two missional moms can produce an “iron sharpening iron” effect in each other’s lives. Betty Marmolejo and Josie Schopen attend Community Christian Church in Naperville and participate in Community 4:12, the church’s compassion and justice ministry led by Kirsten Strand, whose story you read about in chapter 4. Josie is a stay-at-home mom with an eight-year-old daughter, and Betty, who has three kids, ages ten and older, is a part-time English Language Learner teacher at a local middle school. On the surface, Betty and Josie appear to be typical suburban moms. But in partnership, they have been a “brilliant team,” according to Kirsten.

Last summer Josie and Betty began to work together to put a VBS program in place for the children in East Aurora, the low-income community adjacent to Naperville where CCC has a church site. Working in ministry together has catalyzed a friendship that helps both women feel supported and encouraged as they serve. “We took time not just to plan the event but to really get to know one another and build a relationship,” says Betty. “That has really helped us when we are serving together, because I know she really gets me, and we complement one another’s skills.”

Betty and Josie say that being with other people committed to the mission of reaching out to the East Aurora residents has really solidified their own commitment. “Those who minister at Community 4:12 have become my family,” Josie says. “And now the East Aurora ministry has become my ministry; it’s where I’m supposed to be serving.”

Betty adds, “What’s great about being a part of Community 4:12 is that you see others stepping out in faith, and that is so appealing. Those are the kinds of people you want to be with and be like.”

HOW MISSIONAL CHURCHES ENCOURAGE MISSIONAL MOTHERHOOD

Betty, Josie, and Kirsten have found other missional moms as members of a missional church. How do these churches encourage moms to pursue missional lifestyles? Leading missional church practitioners report a number of common strategies for encouraging mothers to lead missional lives.

Missional churches affirm and celebrate missional moms when they find them. Missional churches that celebrate stories of ways mothers demonstrate a missional lifestyle spur other mothers to consider living in the same fashion. Julia Choi is one of the leaders of the Mom's Ministry at Newsong Church in Irvine, California. Choi says, "Whenever there is a mom who is passionate for a cause, we support her in every way we can so she can succeed." She shares story after story about the missional efforts among Newsong moms, such as the woman who raised more than \$6,000 to build a well in Malawi by auctioning off art that the church's children created in Sunday school, or the mom who organizes monthly visits and weekly donations for a Mexican orphanage, or the group of mothers who felt burdened to help a boys' home in Tijuana. Whenever women at Newsong have the spark to engage in missional activity, their efforts are celebrated. "We as leaders are committed to equipping moms for a healthy spiritual life, and a missional purpose is built into that life," Choi says.

Bill White, outreach pastor of Emmanuel Reformed Church (ERC) in Paramount, California, says that, in addition to constantly talking about the mission of the church, he and his fellow pastors are always on the lookout for missional behavior, which they highlight from the pulpit for the encouragement of the entire congregation. "When I hear a story about a mom who decides to be missional and reach out to someone else, I will invite them both up to share their stories. We put a great deal of emphasis on telling stories of people in the church who have caught the vision of missional living," White says. (See Appendix A for an example

of a joint testimony between two women at ERC, demonstrating one mom's obedience to God's call to take initiative in another mom's life.)

J. R. Briggs, pastor of a missional church called the Renew Community in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, agrees that churches need to let moms tell their stories. "A bunch of moms in a church in our area came together and wanted to do something about sex trafficking. They hosted a gigantic neighborhood yard sale—even the newspapers picked up on it—and they made \$5,000 to battle sex trafficking in Southeast Asia. We need to encourage more activities like that, then tell those stories," Briggs says. "And the stories don't even need to be as dramatic as that. Just everyday stories about the ways moms are seeking to transform the lives of other people. Stories inspire more stories, so we commit ten minutes in each of our gatherings to do this."

Missional churches support the work women are doing, whether in or outside the home. As missional churches strive to share how moms are being missional, they also call attention to the wide breadth of what moms are doing in the world. Being missional is about using gifts and abilities to serve God and further His kingdom, and that can occur in a wide variety of contexts. Missional churches celebrate the various ways women do this, whether at home, or in the workplace, or in a ministry setting. "Moms, particularly with young children, experience a great deal of isolation, exhaustion, and guilt," says Briggs. "We need to acknowledge their efforts and let them know we hear those challenges. The church in North America does not do a good job of communicating that we understand and care about this difficult season and affirm the worthiness of mothering."

Similarly, mothers who work outside the home do not often find support for the ways they strive to live out their missional calling. "The mother in the workplace has so many different opportunities to minister there, as any workplace is an extension of the kingdom," says author and pastor David Fitch. "If God has placed

you in a workplace, then every relationship is an opportunity to be used by God to be a witness to the gospel and to Jesus Christ. The church has to find ways to support and care for these moms as they are navigating the working world and also responsibilities at home.” For example, pastors can make sure all the moms’ ministry meetings are not scheduled during the daytime, when working moms are unable to participate. Or church leaders can ask mothers about their jobs and see what work-related prayer needs they might have.

Pastor Dave Ferguson of Community Christian Church believes that helping women see the bigger picture of who God has intended them to be is another way to encourage moms to become more missional. “Whether a woman is a stay-at-home mom or a working mom or somewhere in between, when she understands that she was made to be on a mission, her imagination begins to get sparked. Moms are some of the most creative people around. They are used to thinking up creative solutions to all kinds of life challenges.”

Missional churches challenge cultural values that go against missional ones. Missional pastors do not shy away from addressing the cultural challenges parents face that make it difficult to lead missional lives. We’ve acknowledged the strength of cultural forces assailing our families such as materialism, consumerism, achievement orientation, and busyness. Churches that consistently tackle these issues head-on will encourage more missional ways of thinking. ERC’s Bill White says, “I’m shameless about standing up in the pulpit and asking the congregation if they are invested in the spiritual development of their children. I like to ask, ‘How many of you are praying that your children will become missionaries?’ Erwin McManus says in *Unstoppable Forces* that he tells his son he’s never going to pray for his safety, and we need to challenge our parents to do the same. We wage a constant battle against issues like desiring safety, comfort, and not succumbing to consumerism.”

Briggs has noticed the busyness that has affected the families

in his church. He says, “We need to be asking, ‘What does it mean to have a healthy rhythm in our families?’ There was a mother in our church who decided her kids were just going to participate in only one or two activities. The other moms were saying, ‘I wish I could do that!’ We need to affirm those who make countercultural choices. And we need to push against those tendencies to make idols of our family.”

Missional churches encourage service along the lines of gifts, not roles. One of the challenges women experience in the church once they become mothers is that they begin to feel they are viewed primarily as mothers and not by the other gifts or callings that characterized them before they were moms. Caryn Rivadeneira, author of *Mama's Got a Fake I.D.*, writes, “Talk to three moms, and you’ll find at least one (and more likely two or three) who have been hurt by the church’s tendency to redefine women after they become moms . . . in our zeal to honor moms, we tend to dishonor women.”³ For example, once a woman becomes a mother, often she becomes another name to add to the list of volunteers for children’s ministry duties. But not every woman is called to serve in children’s ministry just because she herself has children.

“It is easy for us in the church to hit the default button for moms, that they should be serving in the children’s ministry, but sometimes that is the last place they want to be especially if they have been with their kids all week,” says Briggs. “We need to not make those assumptions and see where their interests and gifts are.”

When church leaders take the initiative to understand the gifts and talents of the mothers in their congregations and encourage them to serve in those areas of giftedness, women are released to do so much more for the sake of the kingdom. At Community Christian Church, adults are encouraged to go through a “term group,” essentially a temporary small group, in order to understand their personality type, their spiritual giftedness, and their passions. But members are not just encouraged to use that information to benefit the church. “We have many opportunities here at CCC for

a mom to take a first step in serving, but we are certainly not limiting her to those opportunities. We love to hear how God might be leading each person to be on a mission wherever they are—home, work, school, or community,” says pastor Dave Ferguson.

I remember a time when I was feeling the need to serve in multiple areas in our church—leading the children’s worship, teaching a Sunday school class, being a part of the parents’ council for the children’s ministry, and being a small group leader. These were all worthy needs, but none at that point were truly my calling. I eventually burned out from doing too much and doing things not in line with my true ministry passions. In missional churches, the focus is on helping mothers express their giftedness rather than assuming what would be the best places for them to serve, then finding ways to affirm expressions of the giftedness whenever they occur in a response to God’s calling.

Missional churches challenge husbands to be missional as well.

Missional moms often cite the critical importance of missional husbands as a huge source of support. Each and every woman interviewed for this book mentioned the support of her spouse as vital to living out her missional calling. In many cases, these husbands have served alongside their wives in their wives’ ministry efforts. What could be more affirming to a missional wife and mother than to have her husband’s support to make her ministry dream a reality? Here are the comments of just a few of the women who lifted up their husbands as an influential part of their commitment to missional living.

Katy White, the inner-city physician who desires to launch her own health clinic one day, says, “Bill is a great support, because he reminds me often that this is what I’m called and created for. He prays for me, reminds me of my calling, tells me I do have leadership qualities when I’m doubting this, and allows me to do the things I need to, to encourage this sense of calling.”

Remember the supportive husband who stayed home with his infant daughter while his wife made an essential trip to Africa?

Jennifer Jao says, “My life is doable given the man I’ve married. I don’t think it would be doable if my spouse wasn’t as supportive as he is.”

“Without my husband, I couldn’t do any of what I do. He has sacrificed far more than I have,” reports Kirsten Strand, whose husband willingly supported their family’s move to an under-resourced community. “You hear so often about things women do to support husbands in their careers, but it goes both ways.”

My own husband took our three little boys to visit his parents for several weeks so that I could have the quiet and the time I needed to write this book. It was a wonderful, sacrificial expression of support. I am grateful beyond words, and I love the example my husband’s support creates for our boys; he’s modeling how important it is for a husband to support a wife’s calling as well as the reverse. I’m reminded of those moving walkways in airport terminals, and how much farther and faster you travel when you use them. When missional moms have the encouragement of their husbands, they can go further and faster in pursuing their God-given missions. So churches that urge husbands both to be missional and to support their wives’ callings perform a great service for their wives, for their families, and ultimately for the furtherance of God’s kingdom.

Missional churches encourage moms both to “Bloom Where You’re Planted” and “Go Where You’ll Bloom.” Mothers have so many opportunities to “bloom where they’re planted,” just by virtue of being mothers, and missional churches remind their moms frequently of the ways they can embrace their natural connections with other moms to help serve and love others. Pastor Larry Kim of Cambridge Community Fellowship Church of Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is located in an under-resourced part of the city, says, “At our church, it’s become increasingly obvious that the way to reach our at-risk and single mothers is through other mothers. Once we identified the needs, it has felt natural and strategic to call forward the mothers in our congregation to serve.

I've realized that our mothers simply need to be connected with the people, the stories, and the ministry opportunities in our neighborhood."

But mothers can also be encouraged by church leaders to "go where they will bloom" as well as "blooming where they are planted." Sometimes, mothers need that gentle push from church leaders to step out of their comfort zones and try something a little different in order to live more missionally. Life on the Vine's David Fitch believes that "moms have so many wonderful opportunities open to them, they just have to take advantage of them. My wife chose to attend a local mom's group instead of a MOPS group or a church group, and she meets so many non-Christian women who all have immense needs and issues. There is a big empty black hole in our society on the question of how to raise children, and we can help point parents to the answers as we point them to their eternal purposes in Jesus. But first we have to go to where they're at."

Scot McKnight, professor at North Park University and author of the JesusCreed blog (www.patheos.com/community/JesusCreed), which is widely read by missional leaders, offers a simple way of helping people understand what missional living is all about. "Being missional is about answering one simple question: 'How can I help you?' The missional response is to not to say, 'Give me a call if you need help.' It's about giving an active response. Women can ask this central question, whether they are in the workplace, at home, in a women's group. And pastors can encourage mothers to become intentional in this way."

A recent Baylor University study of Baptist families discovered that more than anything else, these families wanted their churches to help them to serve, even more than helping them with communication and marriage matters.⁴ Missional pastors find ways to encourage not just moms, but their whole families to go and serve together. CCFC's Pastor Kim tells how his church experienced this desire from families to serve together. "Our

church was recently challenged with this issue when we planned a missions trip to the Dominican Republic this summer. Two of the families were interested in going, but since we typically designed short-term missions trips for young singles and couples without children, we had to rethink how we would do the missions trip,” Kim says. “We realized we need to be more thoughtful about being missional while including families. Even if parents become more missionally minded, what good is it if there are no opportunities for them to serve?”

Missional churches understand that when children serve with their parents, these children begin to embrace missional values at a young age. “We want tons of kids to serve in our Compton Initiative with their parents,” says ERC’s Bill White. “Our kids have been serving there from the beginning, and they have grown up loving to serve in Compton.” As pastors and church leaders create opportunities for families, they might even lose some of those families who grow to love the neighborhoods they are serving so much that they actually relocate there, as happened with CCC’s Kirsten Strand’s family moving to East Aurora. But CCC’s Pastor Ferguson could not be more pleased that Kirsten has done this and helped to birth a new church campus in East Aurora; this type of missional activity is exactly what he longs to see. In their book *Exponential*, brothers Dave and Jon Ferguson write, “We cannot build facilities big enough or fast enough to keep up with what God wants us to do. We need every follower of Christ engaged and mobilized in the movement.”⁵

I was inspired, challenged, motivated, and energized by spending long periods of time with missional moms, their families, and their missional church leaders. Perhaps this is happening for you, too, as you read. Perhaps these missional ideas jive internally with what you may have been wondering and feeling for years—“Is this all there is to my Christian walk?”—and you desire to grow in the area of being more missional.

But some of you may be feeling disheartened and sobered as

you think about your own church community and networks. You may be asking yourself, “My church is so different from what I imagine a missional community should be. What are my options? What should I do?”

Here is my challenging answer to that question: *You* can be the one to start the missional revolution in your church.

YOU CAN START A MISSIONAL REVOLUTION

At Community Christian Church in Naperville, the Ferguson brothers encourage members to leverage their existing interests and passions to discover their own mission fields. In fact, the first sentence in their book *Exponential* is, “A missional movement can start with you.” CCC constantly reminds its members to dream about what particular mission God has given them to live out and pursue and then helps them to make those dreams a reality.

In your church, *you* can be the one to catalyze a missional perspective, to start your church’s journey toward a lifestyle and vision for the church that involves looking outward and asking, as North Park’s McKnight has suggested, “How can we help? How can our church focus less on what’s going on inside our own walls and see how we can help the needs of the community and world around us?”

Although the concept of missional living seems like a trendy, recent hot topic among churches, ironically there is nothing new about the concept. If anything, the more accurate way to describe the missional movement is to say that it recaptures the legacy of the earliest Christians. So you would not be introducing radical ideas in your church family, as challenging as these ideas may sometimes appear. If you look back through the history of the church, you’ll discover the growth of missional movements largely was driven by women. “Women have done the bulk of ministry in the West for a long, long time. Mothers are typically the most missional people in the church,” McKnight says. “They hear the

cries, they are the ones praying, they are in small groups, they are hearing about the needs. They are the ones helping people. We may not be regularly applying the word ‘missional’ to their activities, but that is in fact what they are doing.”

With this rich legacy, women can certainly be the ones who catalyze a missional intensity in their congregations. What are ways you can encourage a missional perspective in your church?

- ☛ Read works by missional church leaders, and encourage your church leadership to read them, too. This chapter is available as a free download at www.themissionalmom.com/resources, as it’s ideal for sharing with church leaders. There you will also find other recommended resources to help you and your church leaders become more missional.
- ☛ Start a small group book discussion about *The Missional Mom* and see how your group begins to answer the question, “How and where can we help further the mission of God both inside and outside the walls of our church? What are the needs among our church members, in our church neighborhood, or in our own neighborhoods, that we can address?” If you can localize these groups so moms who live in close proximity to one another study the book together, all the better. (Visit www.themissionalmom.com/resources for a free discussion guide to help you talk and share about the issues raised in the book.)
- ☛ In your groups, take an inventory of the gifts and passions represented. Brainstorm about how you can use those gifts and passions collectively to make a difference. Continually ask, “How is God calling us to help others in our friendships/playgroups/activities/workplaces/communities?”
- ☛ Encourage a culture of hospitality in the church as a way to practice more radical expressions later. Especially build opportunities for different groups to intersect—cross-life stage, cross-ethnic, cross-socioeconomic. Break down bar-

riers in the church and encourage fewer cliques and more connections. It is difficult to be missional as a church if there is not a culture of hospitality, especially toward those to whom we do not feel naturally drawn.

- ☛ Think about ways to let families serve together in the church. Encourage small groups or other ministry groups to do service projects together, including children if at all possible.
- ☛ Make serving and loving the poor and the under-resourced a priority in your church. Devote financial and people resources to this ministry and encourage your leaders to highlight the resulting stories from the pulpit.
- ☛ Create accountability groups of no more than two or three people in which you are regularly asking each other challenging questions, particularly with regard to standing firm against cultural forces that work against being missional. (See Appendix B for examples and ideas.)
- ☛ If your small group reads *The Missional Mom* and starts catching the vision to be more missional, have as many people from the group lead other groups to pass along the same ideas. Always think about multiplying your efforts going forward.

Anyone can be missional; everyone can be missional; everyone is called to be missional. The more people who are talking about missional ideas at your church, the faster the ideas can spread. Take the initiative and the risk to start making it happen. But whatever you do, don't try to be missional all on your own. That's a hard wall to climb all by yourself.

The calling God gives us all is the same, whether we live in a community with visible needs or in a well-resourced community where everything appears on the surface to be perfect—or somewhere in between. God's calling is for all Christ-followers: Go and love and serve others. Go and make disciples. Go and be missional.

Whatever you do, *go* out into the world and make a difference. If you are willing, God can do amazing things in and through you.

The Peace Corp has a motto: “Life is calling. How far will you go?” For our purposes, let’s modify the saying just a bit: God is calling. How far will you go? Being a missional mom is all about saying, “I am willing. I will go where you want me to go.” The Wall awaits. It may seem insurmountable, but go grab a team, and start climbing! You will be amazed at what God can do through you as you start working together.