

# Our Family in Corona Time

Richard and Maria Büchsenmeister live in Jeging in Upper Austria. The two supernumeraries have a lot of experience in offering guidance to other families. No wonder, since they have 12 children themselves.

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Dear families,

We're a big family again! Until a few days ago only four of our children were living with us, but with the coronavirus outbreak we have quickly increased to nine out of a total of 12. Luckily, we have a big house, a nice garden, and live in the country, so we are much more fortunate than many families who are confined in small apartments, and who we are praying for especially. Our first concern was: how will this work out over the next few weeks or even months? We realize that we will have to adapt to a new dynamic in our familiar and well-rehearsed family life, with the arrival of the older children who have become adults and who need their own independence now. There is still a lot we have to figure out

We would like to pass on to you what seems to be working for our own family. This plan is not carved in stone, and will certainly change and

develop over time as the situation changes. And we realize that due to your special situations you may have to make a completely different plan.

## **1. Giving structure to the day**

We right away drew up a rough plan for our family life and communicated it to everyone, making it clear to the grown-up children that we expect them to adapt to it too so that we all don't go crazy. The quicker parents and children agree on a common plan, the easier it is to implement it. The morning is now well organized, with the afternoon free.

## **2. Getting up on time, going to bed on time**

Sleeping for as long as you want always puts you in a bad mood. That's why we all eat breakfast together. It's a good time to negotiate the family plan. The adolescents

especially want to have a say. We have breakfast now at 7:30 am, which is much later than during the school year and earlier than during holidays.

In the evening, the time for retiring is that of normal working days, depending of course on age. When the youngest children finally fall asleep, there is still time to spend a pleasant time with the older children. A cup of tea, a film, a book, a board game...

### **3. Meals in common at the family table**

These are very important for us even under normal conditions. The family table is the “workbench” for educating our children. Here one planes and sands off rough edges, and one is happy to see progress being made; here the family members share suffering, argue, laugh and much more. One could

almost say that the family table is the family “altar.” The more that happens around it and on it, the better.

At the same time, we have tried from the beginning to discourage private meals and raiding the refrigerator. A healthy hunger and consequently the joy of a common meal are the result.

#### **4. Uniform learning times**

This has already had a positive effect in the first days. We have eight students living with us, all of whom have received a full workload of learning material. Especially for the elementary and lower school students, it is a great help for them in the morning to see everyone sitting around the kitchen table or at their computers and learning together. We have two fixed study periods, an hour and a half each. A calm atmosphere reigns and no one is unnecessarily distracted. If someone

needs to study longer, then there is still the afternoon. If a child finishes earlier, then he or she doesn't go out into the garden but reads quietly. Luckily we have enough books here!

## **5. Work assignments for everyone**

We have also negotiated work assignments for the children. To be perfectly honest, we didn't really "negotiate" this, but made it clear to our children what was needed. We started on Saturday with a harmless question: "Who can help cook?" Since no one volunteered we had to assign someone. Now some of the children help with the cooking, some work in the garden, others clean the windows... There is plenty of work for everyone. The amazing thing is that a family "working as a team" is good fun! Not only for the parents, but also for the children.

## **6. Relaxing together**

Especially now we find that our morning and afternoon snack times are very important. There is fruit, water, coffee, tea... My wife always reads to the youngest ones during this time. At the moment we are once again reading *The Chronicles of Narnia*. This is a very effective time for strengthening relationships in our family. We spend a wonderful, exciting time together and afterwards we can talk or joke about it... We have a good time!

## 7. New projects

The older children who now are working part-time or from home have more time on their hands. We have for a long time wanted to make the basement a more pleasant place, cleaning it out and disposing of unnecessary things, and have already almost achieved this.

The walls in the rest of the house bear many traces of our children's

adventures. We know from experience what success can be achieved with paint left over from the last general painting. Just paint over the dirty parts and everything is almost like new. It's a job that's still pending!

Another project: dividing the children into new and more age-appropriate rooms. Often there is no need for new furniture, just moving a dresser or bed, bringing down another table from the attic...

My wife keeps talking about the poor lighting conditions in the rooms and vestibules. Maybe I can get some suitable light fixtures over the Internet to install...

And another important project: during the evening prayer time we want to start anew with the religion book series *Faith and Life*. This series has already helped us a lot with the now grown-up children to pass on

the faith clearly and systematically. It's quite simple. I simply read one or part of a chapter and the children ask many questions, and we find ourselves in the middle of a family faith conversation.

## **8. We parents need breaks**

At least that is our good intention! We know how important this is in order to recharge our batteries. We succeed quite well in normal times, but now there is always someone who needs something or wants to tell us something. I look forward to my promising stack of books with great anticipation ...

## **9. Try to focus on the good points**

We have really good children and we know that they sincerely love us and one another. Nevertheless, there has already been some friction with the older children in the past few days...

So we try to focus on the good points! There is so much good to see! And we can see that all these positive traits, these good habits, this humor, this hard work... are also a fruit of our work.

## **10. Rediscovering God**

This certainly begins with thinking more about Him, talking more with Him... But as a family we also want to try out some new ideas: morning prayer before breakfast, the rosary, reading the Bible, following Mass on the Internet... There are so many possibilities!

During this time of coronavirus, it is especially important to care for Sundays. Not only by spending more time together over the meals, but also by dressing better (even if no one sees us).

During a recent time of prayer, I was struck by these words of Saint

Josemaría Escrivá: Our calling is to sanctify everyday life. Our everyday life now includes the current situation of coronavirus, which needs to be sanctified.

All the best and love,

The Richard and Maria Büchsenmeister family

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