

Birds of a Feather

The need for a buddy system among many siblings provided the motto for a Spanish family. Fabrizio Assandri talked to Rosa Pich, mother of 15.

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How can all your children hear you at one time, for example, when you all sit down to eat dinner?

The only moment in which we are all together is around the dining room table. The kids are very happy being all together as each one comments

on the challenges of the school day and the amusing experiences that took place.

How do you manage things like study time, trips outside the house, going to the park?

Our basic system is for an older brother or sister to look after the ones younger than them - each of the older children picks a younger one to mind. In the beginning this system did not function well until Teresa, my nine-year-old daughter, taped a note on to the door of each bedroom. The sign read: "birds of a feather flock together." This became our family motto.

But who helps you do all the cooking, help with the children's studies and clean everyone's clothes?

I work outside the home, but I only work half a day. In that way I return

home for lunch, and spend the afternoon taking care of the kids. They are all at school in the morning anyway. We do have domestic help, there is one person who comes each day to help with the cleaning, cooking and other tasks around the house. My washing machine is normal size, but we run it three times a day. However the kitchen utensils are bigger than the average. I don't think I spend any more time in the kitchen than if I had a family of two or three children. All you have to do is organise well and make things as simple as possible.

**Supporting this number of children must cost a lot of money...
Are you very rich?**

We live off the money my husband and I earn. I always shop in the cheapest supermarkets, buying generic brands. The children all sleep in bunk beds, stacked three or four

high. The children are very happy this way, the important thing is that they live together, have a great time and they are happy.

Isn't it hard being parents of so many children, taking care of their little problems, listening to each one?

You have to have the mind well structured, especially to pass on to the kids the most important things: good values, virtues, good habits...It also helps having a spiritual life: praying in the presence of God, having some acts of devotion during the day. Meditation especially helps me to concentrate on what is absolutely necessary. The most important matter is the formation of the children, everything else that can be delegated to someone else, I try to delegate. For me, the most important thing is not for the house to be immaculate and with no dust at all.

It's not that important that everything be absolutely perfect.

Are you telling me that there are any moments of peace in your house?

It surprised me when a friend of my daughter's, who has only two siblings and is in Year 10, told me she can study here better than at home. Most of the time, the children are at school, or playing out in the yard. But when exam time comes up all the kids know that they should be more quiet, speak as if they were in the library. They are not to run down the hallway, and try to respect the time for study.

What is the normal daytime routine in your home?

On weekdays, I leave the house at 7:00 am to get to Mass. My work begins at 8:15. All the children go off to school, the older ones taking care

that their younger brother and sisters are organized for the school day. The lady who helps out comes in the morning to work here. When I drive to work I leave one of my boys off at the bakery, two blocks away, to pick up twelve loaves of bread, which he carries back home. This job I give to them when they turn seven. And they know that if they do not get up in time, or don't want to do the job, all of their siblings will end up without breakfast.. They soon learn to have a little responsibility.

Aren't you afraid of losing one of the children on excursions? Oh, yes. This is why I dress them all the same. If one child got lost since they all have the same kind of dresses everyone knew it was a child of the woman with 15 kids.

Why did you decide to have so many children?

Both my husband and myself come from large families. He has 13 siblings; I have 15. When we had our first child, the doctors said she would die before her third birthday, due to some heart problem. Afterwards, however, with the advance of medical science, they were able to correct the difficulty. Now she is fine. My second child was born with a similar heart problem and died soon after birth. Sadly, the same thing happened with the third birth. Lots of people told us not to have any more children since the circulatory problem seemed to occur so often. I always looked on a child as a gift for all time, a gift from God really. My husband and I came to the conclusion that we would not worry if any of them died so soon after birth. They are all children of God in any case. And having existence is better than not existing at all.

Why do you think that most couples nowadays feel having two children is a lot?

It depends upon the formation they have received, the atmosphere around them, what is in fashion and sometimes ignorance. They just do not know what they are missing. If they want their children to be truly happy the more brothers and sisters they have ensures a greater joy to each one. I feel that a large family produces many benefits in the habits and virtues one learns for the whole of ones' life. From a young age, the children learn how to survive their little battles with each other, how to work as a team, how to share things, and so many other matters they would never learn as an only child. Today, even multinational corporations are not led by a single individual, but by a team. If a person has learned from a young age how to get along, how to have little spats,

make up afterwards and still continue working together, then it is easier when you are grown up to do the same.

In fact, some of the teachers of my children have told me that they tend to be leaders among their peers. They go out a lot to their friends' houses, and the mothers tell me they adapt to different circumstances very quickly. Here we do everything as a team and the children learn how to be concerned for their classmates in school, none of them ever gets overly preoccupied with themselves.

In conclusion, are you satisfied with this kind of family life?

It does seem like a lot of work, but for my husband and me it does not seem too much. We aim to have the home open to our friends and neighbours almost all the time, since we treasure those friendships. I believe the most important thing is to

give yourself to your husband and the fruit of this love leads to a lot of kids. Then these children all have friends they bring home. This creates a wholesome environment where each one tries to do something for others and struggles to overcome selfishness. With a large family, you have very little time for yourself, and, finally, you realize that you are more happy giving than receiving.

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