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Little House, Big Family!

At the beginning of the fifth week of quarantine I was asked “How are you managing with all your kids in that little house of yours?” My husband and I have a happy little brood of nine children ranging in ages from 5 to 22.

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For the past four weeks there have been 10 of us in our modest little house, but our eldest daughter came home today and now we are 11.

Despite the fact that we do not have much physical space, my husband is thankfully excellent at building and seems to create space where there didn't seem to be any. It is tight and somewhat cramped, but we're used to it, this is home!

It began as an adventure... and then came routine

The quarantine was at first, back in March, somewhat of an adventure. Everyone, from the kindergartener to the university student was initially very excited by the prospect of no more classes. The first few days we looked at it as an extended vacation, and spent our time relaxing around the house and having fun. It didn't take long before we figured out that if we were to survive all together, order and routine would be "essential." This is when we realized we'd need to do our best to instill virtues, for our sake as parents as

well as our children's. "We're all in this together" is our family motto. It's never a question of "us against them" but rather how can all of us be happy together in this little home of ours.

We slowly began to incorporate virtue into our routine. Some naturally took hold without much effort, others we are still working on.

Once the novelty wore off

Mornings begin with waking up on time, making our beds, getting changed and brushing our teeth, emptying the dishwasher, and putting breakfast away. At first it went smoothly; however once the novelty wore off it was a struggle for all of us. I even began to take advantage of the quiet solitude in the mornings when everyone slept in (way past normal wake up time) to enjoy and savour a little "me" time. It seemed so incongruous that here I was desperate to be alone and yet so

many people in the world are suffering from just the opposite. The definition of virtue as a habit kept coming back to me. The idea of having to begin again and again and not giving up also kept returning to mind. Charity, hope, and faith -- these were virtues we strived to acquire.

We used online websites to set a schedule for the younger ones to stay on top of schoolwork while the teenagers in high school continued with distance learning. The older ones continued with their studies and working from home, which was another difficulty for us. We had to try to remain quiet while people conducted meetings online. We posted “meeting in progress” on bedroom doors, but even then it was a challenge. Fortitude, perseverance, and industriousness, we realized, were more virtues to work on.

Challenges, fun and missing our dear ones

My husband remains fully employed, working from home, whereas I was laid off from my part time job, which was somewhat of a blessing. I was able to be more present for the children. Over the weeks we've done sewing, painted a mural, tried but failed at recreating a solar system out of papier-mâché. Our scale was so incorrect that Mercury was the same size as Saturn. (I knew I'd never make it as a homeschooling mom.) I've taught many of them to cook, bake and load and unload a dishwasher properly. We've rebuilt and repainted many bicycles, we've rearranged many desks, pulled out old and aged computers and monitors so that our study now resembles a war room--but it works. I've rearranged the living room to fit a craft table in it.

It's been challenging not seeing our extended family. We all miss our Sunday lunches with Grandma and Grandpa so much. We miss our cousins, nieces and nephews, friends and coworkers. We miss Mass, our community, our parish priest, and our chapel. We are saddened by all the people suffering and dying alone and we try remembering them all in our prayers and our virtual Masses.

A more vibrant home

We struggle to overcome sadness and boredom and laziness. However, with so many of us we soon realize that there is always someone around in need of cheering up or in need of help with something. Our four older boys brought some fun to the table one night when they all wore their suit jackets to supper! Conversations at the dinner table are always fun and linger on much longer than they used to. There is always music

playing somewhere and game night is a new fun time for us. Praying the rosary as a family has also naturally evolved for us. Whereas I used to always invite others to pray it with me, now they join in without much prompting. We aim at a bright and cheerful home; we don't always succeed but we always do our best to begin again.

“How are you managing?”

So to answer the question of how we are managing: “We are doing well, struggling but doing our best to enjoy the situation as best we can--
together.”