

Count Our

If you think your life is hectic, consider
this many children! Here,



Blessings

what it's like raising (and home-schooling)
one mom shares the story of her family—and her faith.

By Michelle Duggar with Andrea Cooper • Photographs by David Barry



The Duggars: Michelle and Jim Bob
with Justin, Jill, Jana, John David,
Jessa, Jinger, Joseph, Josiah, Joy-Anna,
Jedidiah, Jeremiah, Jason and James.
(Joshua is not pictured.)

Compared with the average American family, ours is very unusual. My husband, Jim Bob, and I have 14 children. We've been blessed with nine boys and five girls, including two sets of twins. Our oldest son, Joshua, is 15. The youngest, Justin, is 10 months. We are evangelical Christians and decided to let God dictate the size of our family. To us, each child is a joy, a gift from the Lord.

We live in a part of the country where many people share our beliefs—Springdale, a city of 50,000 in

ers a door in our kitchen. I also keep a weekday schedule for each child. Jim Bob doesn't work a typical 9 to 5 job: He's a real-estate investor and is involved in local politics. He served in our state legislature for four years and last year ran unsuccessfully in the U.S. Senate primary. He's busy, but he manages to find time to come home during the day to help out.

Our household runs smoothly because everyone pitches in. Each older child acts as a "buddy" to a younger one. In the morning, the

prayers. After that, the older kids might do schoolwork or practice the violin or piano. I do chores and try to keep the little ones occupied. In the afternoon, I conduct our school. We work on some subjects as a group, and I also give each child projects appropriate for his or her grade level. Our curriculum emphasizes character—honesty, integrity, initiative, and responsibility. Our motto is "Joy"—for Jesus first, others second, yourself last.

We usually all eat dinner together



OUR HOUSEHOLD RUNS SMOOTHLY BECAUSE EVERYONE PITCHES IN....WE VIEW CHORES AS OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE THE FAMILY—AND TO SERVE GOD.

northwest Arkansas. Like many families we know, we home-school our kids. We feel it's the best way to teach our Christian values. Above all, we want to inspire our children to turn their hearts toward God.

Plenty of parents get frazzled with only a couple of children, so people wonder how we can possibly take care of 14. Believe it or not, I don't find it all that difficult. One key is organization. A huge master schedule for all the kids' activities nearly cov-

older siblings make sure their younger buddies are changed, washed, and dressed. They watch over them at meals, help them with their schoolwork, and even put them down for naps. The older kids have other chores too, like cleaning the garage and helping prepare meals. We view chores as opportunities to serve the family—and to serve God.

Our mornings are busy: I nurse the baby, get the kids breakfast, and then we come together for morning

at around 5 P.M. The three oldest plan and prepare evening meals. They like to do that because they get to choose the menus! Our day ends with baths and then Bible study with Daddy. The boys sleep in the master bedroom, and the girls sleep in a room with bunk beds. (Jim Bob and I have a small room, but we're in the process of building a bigger house, so soon we'll all have more space.) Once the kids are in bed, Jim Bob and I have a little time alone together.

Our schedule is less hectic on the weekends, with Saturdays for rest and Sundays for worship.

Everyday tasks like grocery shopping are more complicated when you're doing them for 16 people. We spend about \$1,500 a month on food. The last time we went shopping, we filled five carts! Our dry pantry is stuffed with 50-pound bags of rice and beans. We've also got two deep freezers and an industrial-size fridge. When fruit goes on sale, we might buy seven bags of apples and five

alike unifies us. As far as cars, we have a bus that seats 24. For smaller trips, we've got a 15-passenger van. And we also have a mobile home for vacations.

I know people wonder how we are able to support such a large family: For one thing, our real-estate investments have been successful. But we also live modestly—and debt-free. Like the Bible says, "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another." Almost everything we buy is second-hand or from estate sales. I sew a lot

known. I don't think they resent their workload. The older ones like to be needed and looked up to, and the younger children love their buddies. The little ones always have someone to play with. When the kids fight, I usually encourage them to settle their problems on their own. If they can't, I'll take away the toy they're fighting over for a few days. They get a lot of opportunities to practice sharing and taking turns.

I realize our lifestyle isn't for everyone. Last year, I was pregnant,



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bags of oranges at a time. That fruit could be gone in two or three days.

For the laundry, I have a wonderful friend from church who comes by twice a week to help. We've got two washers, three dryers, and one giant closet where we store clothes for the entire family. When we go out to eat, it takes a couple of hours to get everybody ready. The kids sometimes dress in matching outfits to help us keep track of them—they've got 10 matching sets. We also feel that dressing

of our clothing. We're saving for our children's education, but we figure only some will want to go to college. Others might go into the ministry or learn a trade. I really don't worry about money. God provides amazingly for us. If our children turn toward Him, I believe He will do the same for them.

People also ask us what the children think about shouldering so much responsibility. I tell them that this is the only life my children have

nursing a child, and looking after 12 more. A lot of people wonder, "How do you manage?" But this is my calling; this is what I love.

When Jim Bob and I got married 19 years ago, we didn't expect to have this many children: I'm the youngest of seven; my husband is one of two. But now, we think it's possible that we'll have even more. As far as we're concerned, that would be wonderful. We really desire to receive as many gifts as the Lord wants to give us. □