

HABITAT HOME WILL GIVE FAMILY A NEW START

Antonio and Maria Estrada came to the United States from Mexico to pursue the American dream. Life went well for the hard-working young couple and their two sons, but the recession and an accident left the family struggling. Now Habitat for Humanity is giving them a fresh start. The Loaves and Fishes coalition of churches, including our congregation, will build a new home for the family this year.

Antonio was born and raised in southern Mexico. His family was very poor, so after completing ninth grade, he moved to Chicago. He worked in warehouses and fast food restaurants, often holding two jobs at once. In 1999 he joined his three brothers in Denver.

Maria had moved from northern Mexico to Denver with her family in 1987. She attended Denver schools and graduated from North High School. She and Antonio wed in 2001, and they had two sons – Marcos, who is now 8, and Emiliano, 5.

Antonio worked in construction, developing a specialty in laying ceramic tile. Maria worked as a receptionist, leased apartments, and worked for a home warranty company. Their sons attended Wyatt Edison charter school. But when the economy collapsed, Maria lost her job, and Antonio could find only part-time, low-wage construction work. Their income dropped by \$25,000. Then Antonio was struck by a car and could not work for nine months. They lost their apartment.

Fortunately, Maria began working at the boys' school as a teacher's aide, and the family received surprising good news: Their landlord offered them the basement apartment in her own Denver home. The Estradas have lived there for 2½ years. Antonio's mother, Gloria Bustamante, lives with them and cares for the boys. Space is tight in the five-room apartment. Curtains divide the rooms, and bedrooms are shared. The boys' Lego constructions fill half the living room floor. The tiny kitchen has no room for a range, so meals are cooked on a hot plate.

The Estradas learned about Habitat for Humanity from a friend who was a Habitat homeowner. She encouraged them to begin the rigorous application process. They submitted their application in January 2011, and a home visit and interviews followed. Good news came in August: They had been accepted.

Habitat volunteers will begin work in May on the family's three-bedroom home at 28 S. Newland in Lakewood. A park is nearby, and the neighborhood includes small rural properties. Jefferson County permits poultry in back yards, and the boys have a head start: They already have two chickens and a duck!

The Estradas' home will be the 14th to be built by Loaves and Fishes. Habitat for Humanity does not give away homes; the family will pay off a 30-year, no-interest mortgage. The Estradas are also fulfilling other requirements, doing "sweat equity" labor on other Habitat homes, volunteering on fund-raising projects, working at Habitat's outlet stores and attending classes for homeowners.

END OF STORY