

## ERNESTO ESTRADA, COLLEGE GRADUATE



Ernesto Estrada graduated on November 17, 2023 from the University of Alberto Masferrer in San Salvador, El Salvador with a degree in Nursing. Ellen and Kerm Fendler, St. Elizabeth's parishioners, had the honor of attending Ernesto's graduation ceremony in San Salvador and his graduation party in his hometown of Agua Caliente.

Ernesto is one of almost 100 young people that St. Elizabeth's parishioners, along with friends and acquaintances, have supported with scholarships for their primary, secondary and post-secondary education. Since these students are from extremely impoverished areas in El Salvador, they have little chance of completing high school, much less college, without financial assistance.

Ernesto started in the scholarship program in 2017. Like many young people in El Salvador, his journey through school was difficult. When he started college, for instance, his commute on foot and by bus took more than two hours each way each day. During his last year of college, his father was arrested without due process under the country's state of exception, and he spent five months in jail. This put a tremendous strain on Ernesto, who seriously contemplated dropping out of school to support the family. Thankfully, Ernesto stayed the course, and his father was released from jail after a court determined that the charges against him were false.

Ernesto's graduation party took place outside the family home. It was quite a celebration, with almost **250** people in attendance, mostly family and people from his community. Everybody

was excited and delighted to be there. And why wouldn't they be? After all, Ernesto is the first college graduate in his family and within the community. That is certainly something worth celebrating.

Once Ernesto gets his nursing license, he plans to work in a healthcare facility in the nearby town of Suchitoto. He is excited about the opportunity afforded him by his professional degree to care for people. He said he will also work hard to support his community, as well as CIS, the organization that connected Ernesto's community with St. Elizabeth's in 2013.

Ernesto is hoping to visit Kansas City in the fall of 2024. He wants to meet St. Elizabeth's parishioners in person to tell his story. Stay tuned for an announcement about that in the near future.