



Father Gregory Boyle, center, greets supporters while walking from Homeboy Industries to Los Angeles City Hall on Friday, May 17, 2024, ahead of the city's "Father Greg Boyle Day" proclamation. (Alejandra Molina)

Alejandra Molina

[View Author Profile](#)

Religion News Service

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Los Angeles — May 21, 2024

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The city of Los Angeles has proclaimed May 19th "Father Greg Boyle Day," honoring the beloved Jesuit Catholic priest who founded Homeboy Industries, regarded as the largest gang-intervention and rehabilitation program in the world.

On the day of the proclamation, Friday (May 17), "Father G," as he is known, locked arms with his "homeboys" and took a pilgrimage from the downtown Homeboy facility to Los Angeles City Hall, where Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez lauded Boyle for his dedication in "uplifting those who are often left behind in our society."

"No one should be defined by some of their most traumatic moments in their lives, and Father Greg Boyle acts on that every single day," Hernandez said, adding that Boyle has fueled a "movement that empowers individuals with the tools they need to regain agency over their lives."

Made two days before Boyle's 70th birthday, which fell on Sunday (May 19), the proclamation highlighted the beginnings of his priesthood in the L.A. neighborhood of Boyle Heights, where he rode his beach cruiser and "engaged with the entire community as the first priest to build purposeful relationships." Boyle, the proclamation declared, "took a stand against the demonization of gang members" and created "a place within the church for immigrants to find refuge."

Friday's celebration began at Homeboy, where several dozen people gathered to celebrate Boyle's upcoming birthday. They sang "Angel Baby" and "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" as a mariachi group serenaded Boyle, who posed for numerous selfies throughout the morning. Some held signs reading "Gee Day All Day" and "Father Gee Saved My Life." Many wore pins with an image of Boyle's face as well as blue T-shirts emblazoned with the words "G Day."

During the celebration, Boyle, who was ordained a Catholic priest in 1984, spoke of how Homeboy has inspired people on an international level.

He mentioned a recent trip he made to Belfast, Ireland, where he met with Turnaround Project, an organization that provides training and employment to those who have been in prison. Boyle said the program was modeled after Homeboy and mentioned meeting with people still reeling from "the troubles," a decades-long period of violence between Catholics and Protestants that happened throughout the 1990s.

"It wasn't gangs, but it was a division," Boyle said. "It's about our vision here, where we say clearly, 'hope has an address.'"

Boyle recalled when Homeboy Industries in 2010 was forced to lay off 300 people after revenues plummeted, and a "homie came in, and he didn't say, 'there goes my paycheck.' He said, 'there goes my hope.'"

Homeboy Industries has since turned around, experiencing a ["quantum leap"](#) in economic stability in 2021 when it received \$15 [million in long-term funding from the state of California](#) and a [\\$20 million gift from billionaire philanthropist MacKenzie Scott](#).

"What you maintain here is an announcement to the world, but especially to the city and this county, that everyone should enjoy hope," Boyle told the crowd.

Advertisement

The proclamation comes just two weeks after Boyle received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States.

Boyle was one of 19 people honored by President Joe Biden at the White House on May 3. Boyle's service, Biden said, "reminds us of the power of redemption, rehabilitation, and our obligation to those who have been condemned or counted out."

In 1986, Boyle became priest of Dolores Mission Church in Boyle Heights, which at the time, was the poorest parish in the city.

The church served residents from two nearby housing projects. Gang violence was at its peak with youth and adult gang-related homicides [drastically rising](#) in the late '80s and early '90s. About nine gangs were active in the vicinity of the parish, the [mission's website noted](#).

By 1988, Boyle and several mothers who were part of the Dolores Mission parish, created "Jobs for a Future," which provided access for formerly incarcerated people to find job placements and employment.

The project evolved into Homeboy Industries — which now draws about 10,000 people every year — all seeking a range of services, from anger management and

job training to domestic violence support, legal assistance and tattoo removal. Homeboy also employs people in its own social enterprises, including a bakery, cafe and diner, as well as a silkscreen and embroidery shop, farmers' markets and catering services. Jorge Contreras, 55, recently went through the Homeboy training and said Boyle has helped him cope through hardships. Contreras got out of prison and secured a job after receiving certification through the Homeboy Electronics Recycling enterprise.

"No matter how many times you fall down, he's going to pick you up," Contreras said. "He's been a blessing. He took a chance on me."

"It's like peace when you talk to him," Contreras said of Boyle, adding, "God is beautiful. God is everything. He's a little bit like that."