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Special Edition Newsletter

Homecoming with Fr. Greg Boyle, S.J.

By Pat Clough

Assisted by Angel Rodriquez of Homeboy Industries

The streets of downtown Los Angeles were mostly deserted at 8:30am as an Uber dropped me off at Homeboy Industries. Father Greg had invited me to Morning Meeting saying, "come early, it'll be packed." Inside, it was standing room only – 200 people strong. Swept into a welcoming sea of Homeboys and Homegirls, one offered me his chair, but I couldn't see so I stood like almost everyone else. Father Greg summoned us to prayer standing at a microphone quieting the buzz and laughter. The two-story main meeting area was home. People were home, hugging and joyous as though they'd been away for a long time and just arrived, and for some, that was true. I understand the name given this special place. Homecoming is what happens every weekday.



Homeboy Industries Headquarters



After the prayer, “G” or “Pops” as he is warmly called, invited a few speakers forward. I had just met Tom, a Native American, who stood to read a tribal prayer. He’d come from Kansas City nine months earlier to have his tattoos removed and decided to stay. A teacher announced the class she would teaching at 9:15 in Classroom B: “Try This Instead of That Without Violence.” Then the group shouted in unison **“there’s no place like Homeboys,”** and left for their jobs and classes. I could smell coffee and headed to the café. José and Shannel, the team behind the counter, posed for a photo wearing their Homegirl Café aprons. And they were busy taking orders and bringing breakfast to visitors like me. The bakery was behind the café: a large, full-scale bakery with ovens and stainless-steel counters covered with sheets of muffins and scones, and freshly baked bread. Bakers-in-training in Homegirl Café aprons, smiled and waved.

Shannel & José



From left to right: José, Jenny, Brandon & Rodney

Moments later, Father Greg assigned me to my tour guide. I got to know José’s story over the next few hours and the stories of homies we met along the way. No holding back – life stories of trauma and pain transcended in this home for healing. José had just graduated from high school in December. He introduced me to his proud teacher who informed him he was now ready for his associate’s degree! He beamed. I met Jesuit Father Mark Torres and the mental health case workers, the counselors in Legal Aid sitting with homies to review their legal cases, high school teachers in their classrooms, and of course, the homies helping trainees navigate their individualized programs as mentors and coaches.

Kindness Scales the Walls

Father Greg summons a steady stream of homies into his office. I can see him through the glass windows that look out into the meeting room where many are gathered seeking a few minutes of his time. A young mother, her infant held to her chest, enters as he rises from his desk to embrace her and bless them. Tears role down her checks and he sees them. Another hug. When it's my turn, clearly moved by the young mother who just left, he tells me: "we're all held by anguish in need of soothing. Tenderness scales the walls here, it always does." Anguish – a deep and paralyzing feeling. It builds walls. Kindness is the antidote. It opens hearts. It breaks through barriers and welcomes the anguished. In his latest book, *Cherished Belonging, The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times*, Father Greg speaks the language of the homeboy vision; an outcome of tenderness is joy. "Joy is a decision," he says, "one decides to let love live through you."

Love is at the heart of morning meeting and in the offices upstairs and the classrooms next door, where health and well-being offer hope. Joy sings. The homies are used to hearing "You are holy ground."

Hope Village

I ask Father Greg about his vision for his "small city" in downtown Los Angeles. He sees Hope Village as an alternative to incarceration and homelessness, a model for the nation as a full-scale education and rehabilitation center. He describes his plan for housing men and women during their 18-month trainee program and offering transitional housing to those ready for the next steps in their recovery. Homeboy Industries has purchased several vacant lots across the street from headquarters and submitted housing plans to the City of Los Angles, but approval departments move slowly. Recently, Father Greg contacted Mayor Karen Bass and specifically asked for her help to expedite approvals so construction can begin. Hope Village, where people are cherished, accompanied, and loved.



Angel & Manny

Next, I find Angel Rodriquez in the Well – the welcome hub of Homeboy Industries where trainees are greeters and guides. She has been a trainee for almost a year and hopes her next job will be assisting case managers as a Navigator. She has done so well since she entered her own healing process that she convinced her 26-year-old son to join her. Last month, Father Greg took Angel and Manny to Minneapolis with him to give a talk at Totino Grace High School. He introduces them as mother and son – models of hope. Manny goes first and for five minutes, shares his story. Angel's eyes fill with tears as she recounts the moment (continued)

with joy and pride. "There was so much applause! We are a team." Mother and son; they are holy ground. I asked Angel what she loves most about her son. "The fact that he's very caring and loves his son so much; that even though his dad wasn't there for him growing up, he's there for his son, and it shows in how much Lorenzo, loves his dad." Manny will receive his high school diploma in June.



From left to right: Nedra, Gabriel & Angel

Keepers of the Well, Nedra, Gabriel, and Angel go outside with me for a photo under the newest mural – Kinship. They tell me there are 450 trainees like them and 180 senior staff. Almost 800 people are part of this growing family. Kinship – a practice and a calling. In the words of St. Ignatius, "it's a felt experience."

On May 22nd, 2025, at the 100-year gala celebration of El Retiro, The Jesuit Retreat Center, Father Greg will be the first recipient of the San Ignacio award. He will be the keynote speaker at the Thursday evening dinner followed by a sold-out weekend retreat. Homies have accompanied him to El Retiro at least twice a year since 2007. Their stories give hope and nourishment to 100 retreatants each time. It is "homecoming" in the Gellert Rotunda and Father Greg and his companions bring it to

us, reminding us of the healing power of love, the welcome home that summons us, the kindness that scales walls, and the dream of more villages called Hope.

Pat Clough is a writer living in Palo Alto, CA. She is a second year student in the Pierre Favre program and a frequent retreatant at El Retiro. She is our guide through this journey in time at The Jesuit Retreat Center.

Edited & designed by Pooja Jain, Development & Communications Specialist, Jesuit Retreat Center