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## A Homeboy holiday

by Joe Ferullo

NCR Today



This time of year, my mailbox is stuffed with catalogs -- page after

page of gadgets and gift suggestions, items that no one really seems to need. But then, a couple of days ago, something quite different hit my front steps.

It was a small, colorful brochure from Homeboy Industries, the nonprofit business founded by Jesuit Fr. Greg Boyle to create jobs for often-unemployable ex-gangsters and gang-girls in Los Angeles. This little

mailing was just the latest sign of how Fr. Boyle and his donors have turned around an establishment that looked to be in a death spiral just one year ago.

As the economy plunged, so did donations to Homeboy -- Fr. Boyle took to the airwaves and implored people to step up donations and keep the place afloat. He promised he had a plan to build a Homeboy group that could stand on its own financial feet. People in Los Angeles came through, and so did Fr. Greg (G-Dog to his gangster clients.)

The holiday mailing lists the remarkable year Homeboy has had: wide distribution of their salsas and chips on major Southern California supermarket chains; Homeboy teams sent out to more than 20 local farmers markets to sell their goods; the opening of Homeboy Diner on the second floor of Los Angeles City Hall; more than 400 youths enrolled in job-readiness classes.

Beyond all that, Fr. Boyle himself just this month was inducted into the California Hall of Fame and was named an Opus Prize finalist, winning a \$100,000 award for his efforts to end gang violence and the cycle of poverty in LA's poorest neighborhoods.

And so this lovely brochure sits on my kitchen table. "Warmest Holidays to You," it says, and details the line of fresh-baked holiday gifts I can order from Homeboy Bakery and the Homegirls Cafe: cookies, pies, tamales and catering for special events. The mailing looks inviting and, well, professional, a goal Fr. Boyle set out for himself and his group -- the best holiday gift that all have given to each other.

Homeboy Industries still counts on donations -- you can only help so many people selling \$2 tamales. But Homeboy is on solid foundation: diversified, energized and creative.

That's a place more companies wish they were at these days.

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