In Brief

As a priest in Boyle Heights, the area with the highest concentration of gangs in the entire city of Los Angeles, Father Greg Boyle experiences firsthand the climate of hopelessness that causes young people to turn to gangs. Determined to find real solutions to the violence in his community, Boyle developed his own program to reduce gang activity.

“We must have a high degree of reverence for the complexity of the problem in order to do something effective. Gang violence is a symptom of intense poverty, despair, unemployment and racism,” said Boyle at Boalt during his November lecture, “Youth Gang Violence: Teenage Suicide for the Urban Poor.”

During the talk, which was sponsored by Boalt’s Death Penalty Clinic and Center for Social Justice, Boyle explained how his program gives a second chance to young people in the community. Convinced that many gang members would choose to earn an honest living if they had the opportunity, in 1988 Boyle created Jobs for a Future. Guided by the motto, “Nothing stops a bullet like a job,” the program provides at-risk youth with a range of employment services, including job placement, counseling, community service opportunities and tattoo removal.

The organization also includes an economic development branch called Homeboy Industries. Designed to teach valuable job skills to those with little or no employment experience, Homeboy Industries brings former enemy gang members together to work side by side in the program’s bakery, graffiti removal patrol, and silkscreening and merchandise ventures.