

REAL CHANGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF REDWOOD GOSPEL MISSIONS



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MAY 2026

Her Birthday Was Ignored

For years, Lainee didn't pay attention to the calendar.

When you're homeless, every day feels the same. Survival takes over. You try not to think about tomorrow.

"There were no birthdays, no Christmas, no Thanksgiving," Lainee remembers. "I didn't have any holiday. And my birthday came, I didn't even know it."

She didn't want to know.

"I didn't want to know that it was my birthday because it would make me sad."

After years of addiction, Lainee lost her job, her apartment and eventually her stability. What began as a hidden struggle became nine long years of homelessness.

Someone Still Cared

"You basically are just in survival mode," she says. "It's like hell."

Over time, her world grew smaller and more dangerous. At one point, her family reported her missing. They feared the worst.

But that report reminded her that someone was still looking for her.

(Continues inside)

"I didn't even know it was my birthday." – Lainee



She Didn't Even Know It Was Her Birthday

(Continued from cover)



"My life right now is amazing." – Lainee

An Easter Turning Point

When Lainee returned to the Bay Area, she had no money and no plan. Her family helped her call Redwood Gospel Missions.

There was one bed available.

Not Invisible

Staff told her they would hold it if she resolved a legal issue and stayed in contact. She made the long trip back and forth. *"It was very, very hard,"* she says.

But when she arrived, something changed.

"It brought me to God. It did everything. It gave me a support system," she says. *"At my blessing circle, it was a room full of people that love me. I've never felt like that in my life."*

For the first time in years, she was not invisible.

She was known, prayed for and supported. When she struggled, someone checked on her.

Today, Lainee's life looks very different.

"My life right now is amazing," she says.

She's in college working toward a certificate in addiction counseling and earned two A's in her first

semester. She stays connected to counseling and her family. Recently, she began working at the Mission's Family Campus, welcoming women at the front desk.

She knows what it feels like to believe your life doesn't matter. She knows what it's like to forget your own birthday.

That's why the Homeless Birthday Party means so much to her.

A Party Means You Are Somebody

"So they know that they're loved," she says. *"When you're homeless... nobody wants to help you... this homeless birthday party you guys do is a huge deal to show that there's people out there that care about them."*

Sometimes a cake, a meal and people celebrating you is the first reminder that your life has value.

Looking back, Lainee says it simply, *"I believe I would be dead without their help."*

Because of your kindness, she found hope, faith and a future.

And now, with her work at the Mission, she helps others discover that they are seen, loved and valued.

Thank you for making that celebration possible.

Your gift today will help a homeless neighbor, like Lainee, feel seen and valuable. That is often the beginning of life transformation.



Jesus Believed In Parties



Jeff Gilman
Executive Director

In Luke 15, the Pharisees grumbled because Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them.

So, Jesus told stories. A lost sheep. A lost coin. A lost son.

And in that last story, when the son finally came home from the pigsty, the father did something unexpected.

He threw a party.

I think about that every year when we host the Homeless Birthday Party.

Some people might wonder why we celebrate. Why decorate? Why serve cake and sing songs for men and women who are still struggling?

But I don't have to wonder.

Because I know who we are.

We are the prodigal. We are the ones who wandered. We are the ones who needed the Father to run toward us, put a robe on our shoulders and call us His child.

God loves them. Period.

And sometimes the first way someone begins to believe that is when people celebrate their birthday.

The Homeless Birthday Party is not about fixing someone in a day. It's about declaring their worth. It's about saying, You were created. You matter. You are not forgotten.

Thank you for standing with us as we celebrate the sons and daughters God loves.



***Will you help make that celebration possible?
Each \$2.02 you give provides one birthday meal.***

Celebrating Each Person!



For nearly a decade, Garrett and friends from Spring Hills Community Church have shown up to the Homeless Birthday Party with grills, hamburgers and a ready smile.

"Typically, our church provides the main lunch," Garrett explains. "We bring in a team that cooks the hamburgers... and serves at the line as the guests come in to receive a meal."

But for Garrett, this day is about much more than food.

"We're celebrating life," he says. "We're celebrating the fact that each individual person is created in the image of God and valuable and important to God."

As a pastor, Garrett sees the party as an opportunity to practice what it means to follow Christ outside the walls of a church building.

"People can come to an event like this and see what being a Christian looks like... loving others, serving others, putting others' needs before their own."

When he invites volunteers to join, the response is usually enthusiastic.

"Most of the time the reaction is a positive, excited response," he says. "Many people in our church are hungry for opportunities like this."

And to anyone who hasn't served before?

"You'll never be disappointed," Garrett says. "You just need to make yourself available... just by your presence."

Sometimes a smile, a meal and a simple "Happy Birthday" can go a very long way.

Go to rgm.org/hbp to learn about opportunities to serve at our Homeless Birthday Party.

Garrett and Spring Hills Community Church have served and blessed many at the Homeless Birthday Party.



Sign and Return Your Birthday Card



A birthday just isn't the same without a card.

You can help make sure every guest leaves with one in hand:

1. Sign your first name — and a brief note if you'd like.
2. Place it in the enclosed envelope and return it to the Mission by May 18th so it arrives in time for the party.
3. Say a prayer for the person who will open it.
4. Picture the moment they read it — especially if it's the first birthday card they've received in years.



Blessing Bags



Our goal is to give every party guest a Birthday Blessing Bag.

You can help make sure there's enough by stuffing your own and dropping it off before the party!

Gather the following supplies together (we will do all the wrapping):

- \$10 Gift Card
- Reusable Water Bottle
- Cell Phone Charger (\$5-10 price range)
- Socks
- You can bulk order items from our amazon wish list: www.rgm.org/hbp.

Drop off your completed bags at the main office, Redwood Gospel Missions Ministry Support Office 2447 Summerfield Road by May 18th. M-F, 8a-1p and 2-5p. Leydiana King, lking@rgm.org or phone 707.578.1830 X 224.

In addition to a great meal, birthday cake, comfort ministries like haircuts, a clothing give-away and birthday cards, we want each homeless guest to take home a Blessing Bag.



Give \$2.02 Birthday Meals!



Everyone longs to be valued.

From the very start, God created each person in His image. That means their worth is not earned. It is given. It cannot be lost, even when circumstances are tough.

Yet many of our homeless neighbors don't believe that about themselves. Years of hardship and rejection have convinced them they are invisible... or worse, a burden.

The Homeless Birthday Party is one simple, powerful way to tell a different story.

It's a day to celebrate the fact that they were born. A day to declare that their life matters because God says it does.

**Will you help make that celebration possible?
Each \$2.02 you give provides one birthday meal.**

And when you return your signed birthday card, you help place a tangible reminder in someone's hands that they are seen, valued and deeply loved.

You can also give at: rgm.org/birthday



Each \$2.02 you give helps provide a birthday meal for a homeless neighbor.

A Legacy of Compassion



The Homeless Birthday Party may last a day, but the message behind it lasts all year: your life matters.

Friends like you help us speak that truth every day.

Through legacy giving, that celebration continues far beyond one event. The meals, the welcome, the life change — they carry on because faithful partners invested in the future.

And years later, your love and compassion will bless our poor and needy neighbors.

For more information on legacy giving, contact Jeff Gilman at 707.578.1830.



Each \$2.02 you give will help provide a birthday meal for one person!



*Our beloved board member, John Adams passed away.
We are so thankful for his time and ask that you remember him in your prayers.*



REAL CHANGE is the newsletter of Redwood Gospel Missions
PO Box 493, Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0493
T: 707.578.1830 | F: 707.578.4841 | rgm.org

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