

# REV. ROBERT W. WOOD

b. May 21, 1923

## GAY PIONEER

*"Is it proper for two of the same sex  
to enter the institution of marriage?  
To which I must reply, 'Yes.' "*

**Wood picketed in his  
clerical collar at the  
Annual Reminders, which  
launched the LGBT civil  
rights movement.**

The Reverend Robert Wood is the first member of the clergy to picket for gay rights. He wrote the first book in the United States on Christianity and homosexuality and was the first to call for church-sanctioned gay marriage.

Wood began his undergraduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania, three months before the attack on Pearl Harbor. He enlisted in the Army soon after and was severely wounded. He received a Combat Infantry Badge, a Purple Heart, two battle stars and a Bronze Star for heroic achievement in combat. A chapter of the book "We Went to War: New Hampshire Remembers" recounts his story.

With the help of the G.I. Bill, Wood graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology. In 1951 he was ordained in the Congregational Church. He spent 35 years as a parish pastor.

In 1956 Wood wrote "Spiritual Exercises," an article for a gay physique magazine that featured a photo of him in his clerical collar. It was his way of coming out. After meeting Edward Sagarin, who wrote the groundbreaking book "The Homosexual in America" (using the pen name Donald Webster Cory), Wood was inspired to write "Christ and the Homosexual" (1960) under his own name. In the book, Wood called for the Christian Church not only to welcome homosexuals, but also to recognize same-sex marriage, which he had performed long before it was legal. In 1960 The Mattachine Society and The Provincetown Players honored Wood with Awards of Merit.

From 1965 to 1969, Wood bravely protested in his clerical collar at the Annual Reminders, the first public demonstrations specifically demanding gay and lesbian equality. Held each Fourth of July in front of Independence Hall, the Annual Reminders launched the LGBT civil rights movement and paved the way for the Stonewall riot. At the first Annual Reminder, 40 gay and lesbian activists from New York, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia participated. By 1965 their numbers had more than tripled.

In 1962 Wood met Hugh M. Coulter—an artist, a cowboy and a fellow World War II veteran—in a gay leather bar in Manhattan. A month before the first Annual Reminder, the couple marched in the nation's first gay picket line in Washington, D.C., with 18 other gay men and 7 lesbians.

Wood and Coulter spent 27 years together and wore matching gold wedding rings. Coulter died in 1989.

Wood appeared in "Gay Pioneers," a documentary about the Annual Reminders co-produced by WHYY/PBS and Equality Forum. Wood was honored as a pioneer by the Christian Association at the University of Pennsylvania and the United Church of Christ Coalition of LGBT Concern.

At 92, Wood's health prevents him from participating in the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the LGBT Civil Rights Movement, which honors him and the other Gay Pioneers for their courageous seminal efforts.



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