

BREAKING: Former AG Superintendent George O. Wood Dies of Stage 4 Cancer at 80

Former Assemblies of God general superintendent George Oliver Wood died Jan. 12 after a 4½-month struggle with stage 4 cancer.

Wood received a cancer diagnosis on Aug. 30, 2021, two days before his 80th birthday. He underwent a series of chemotherapy and clinical trial drug treatments at Siteman Care Center in St. Louis, Missouri, for the cancer in his esophagus, which had spread to his liver and vertebrae. The treatments were discontinued after disastrous side effects.

Wood left office in **2017** as the fourth longest-serving leader out of the 13 general superintendents of the Missouri-based U.S. Assemblies of God, which is now in its 107th year.

He resigned at the age of 75 after a decade in the post. Wood became the first general superintendent to have been a missionary kid, the first to graduate from the Assemblies of God's Evangel **University**, the first with an earned doctorate and the first to use a computer in his daily work. Wood kept followers updated about his hospitalized condition via upbeat Facebook updates.

"I have said so many times to the wonderful nurses and doctors here that I have two great alternatives," Wood wrote in a post on his 15th day at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis in November. "One is to go home in Springfield and the other is to go home to heaven.... If I am not healed, it certainly is not from a lack of faith either on my part or of all the people who are praying for me."

Despite his suffering, Wood remained cheerful. In a December

2021 interview with his successor Doug Clay published in *AG News*, Wood reiterated the peace he felt from the Lord and how he felt the strongest he'd ever been spiritually even though he was physically weak.

But Wood took a turn for the worse this week, contracting non-COVID pneumonia. His family surrounded him at his bedside before he died.

Remarkable Growth

During Wood's tenure as leader, the U.S. fellowship experienced consistent numerical growth. The U.S. Assemblies of God grew to a then-record number of adherents, 3,240,258, under Wood's leadership—a rise from 2,863,265 a decade earlier. The number of U.S. Assemblies of God churches rose to an all-time high of 13,023, an increase from 12,362 in 2007.

He helped move the Assemblies of God to a more diverse body that better reflected the nation's overall demographics. The fellowship became one of the most ethnically diverse denominations in America, with 42.3% of adherents representing ethnic minorities when he left office, compared to 36.9% when he began.

Prayer for racial reconciliation became one of the priorities of his governance. He left as leader of a 21-member Executive Presbytery that included seven ethnic minorities and two females—compared to 14 men, all white, when he took office.

In addition, during Wood's tenure, the percentage of women ministers in the U.S. fellowship increased to 24.3% from 19.2%.

Under Wood's leadership as general superintendent, a number of initiatives started, including AGTrust, which has raised over \$23 million for church planting and revitalization, scholarships and multiple new initiatives and resources. The Church Multiplication Network also launched, leading to 3,307

congregations added to the fellowship in 10 years. Other ministries founded during his decade of leadership included Acts 2 Journey, Center for Holy Land Studies and My Healthy Church.

Wood, who spent the last years of his life in Ozark, Missouri, kept busy after leaving the general superintendent's post. Since 2008, he had been chairman of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, the world's largest Pentecostal body, with over 160 member countries representing 70 million adherents. He likewise continued to serve, as he had since 2014, as global co-chairman of Empowered21, a movement bringing together Pentecostal leaders working for all to have a Holy Spirit encounter.

He also served as interim president of his alma mater Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri, following the November 2020 retirement of Carol A. Taylor until new president Mike L. Rakes began his duties in the fall 2021 semester.

Missionary Roots

Wood was the son of missionary parents George Roy Wood and Elizabeth Weidman, who wed in China in 1932. After returning to the U.S. in 1949, eight years after their son's birth, the Woods pastored small churches and traveled as evangelists.

George R. Wood, who had only a fifth grade education, urged his son to attend college. His father suggested he obtain a teaching degree from Evangel University rather than attend Central Bible College, in case he failed as a pastor. George O. not only graduated from Evangel, he went on to earn a doctoral degree in pastoral theology from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and a juris doctorate from Western State University College of Law in Fullerton, California. He had been an ordained Assemblies of God minister since 1967.

Wood served as director of spiritual life and student life at

Evangel University from 1965-71; pastor of Mesa Church in Costa Mesa, California, for 17 years; assistant superintendent of the Southern California Ministry Network from 1988-93; and general secretary of the national Assemblies of God from 1993 to 2007.

As general superintendent, the trained attorney championed religious liberties involving persecution of Christians worldwide, defending biblical principles in the U.S. and championing Christian rights in the public arena.

In 2009, Wood supported the General Council adding a fourth reason for being—compassion—to its list of evangelism, worship and discipleship, with Convoy of Hope serving as the Fellowship's preferred partner.

"We live in a culture in which the Church has to earn credibility, and without acts of compassion I believe the church loses its credibility in the world," Wood told the *Pentecostal Evangel* at the time.

At the 2017 General Council, Wood withdrew his name from contention for reelection as general superintendent. Voters subsequently elected Clay to the post. Wood had succeeded Thomas E. Trask, who chose to step down midway through his term, in 2007.

Lasting Legacy

Clay, who served as Assemblies of God general treasurer for eight years under Wood, considered him a mentor and friend.

"George O. Wood's legacy is that of being a man of the Word," Clay said. "He had tremendous intellect, but never depended on that at the expense of being led by the Spirit." Clay called Wood a "bridge builder" and "Pentecostal statesman," well respected by Christian leaders of various denominations, as well as by Assemblies of God leaders throughout the world.

“He had a unique ability to open doors for young people, women, and ethnic minorities by providing them a meaningful seat at the table,” Clay said. “That has been a major force behind our growth in each of those areas. His mentorship in my life was invaluable. Each leadership decision he made was always processed through Scripture. He made my love for the Bible even richer. His legal credentials gave him a unique perspective to address cultural issues with biblical clarity.”

Wood and his wife, Jewel, celebrated 56 years of marriage on Dec. 27. They raised two children. Son George Paul Wood is executive editor of *Influence*, the Assemblies of God periodical for ministry leaders. Daughter Evangeline Hope Zorehkey lives in Ozark.

Wood authored numerous books, including *Roadtrip Leadership*, *Living in the Spirit*, *A Psalm in Your Heart*, *Fearless*, *Living Fully* and *The Successful Life*. Many of the sermons he preached are available at [. {eo}](#)

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