

Episcopal priest, Malcolm Boyd, is star of a new documentary

Director Andrew Thomas's film 'Disturber of the Peace' follows the Rev. Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest who was one of the first to come out publicly as gay and says the church is too separated from the concerns of the average person.

By Gary G. Yerkey

Los Angeles filmmaker [Andrew Thomas](#) has turned his attention from the secular to the religious by directing a feature-length documentary on the life and times of the Rev. Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest who says the church needs to be more relevant to the everyday person and has worked to improve that issue.



Filmmaker Andrew Thomas (l.) has created a documentary which chronicles the life of Malcolm Boyd (r.), an Episcopal priest who was one of the first to come out as gay and who has become well-known for his views that the church is too separated from the everyday lives of Americans.

Thomas, who has created, produced and written series for A&E and the Discovery Channel, said he plans to release a preview of the film, "Disturber of the Peace," at the Palm Springs Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in California on Sept. 21 and expects to release the film at selected theaters across the country early next year.

He said the film will contain extensive past and present-day exclusive footage of Boyd, who turned 90 years old on June 8, along with interviews with those who knew and worked with him during his long career, including political activist Tom Hayden and actress Lily Tomlin.

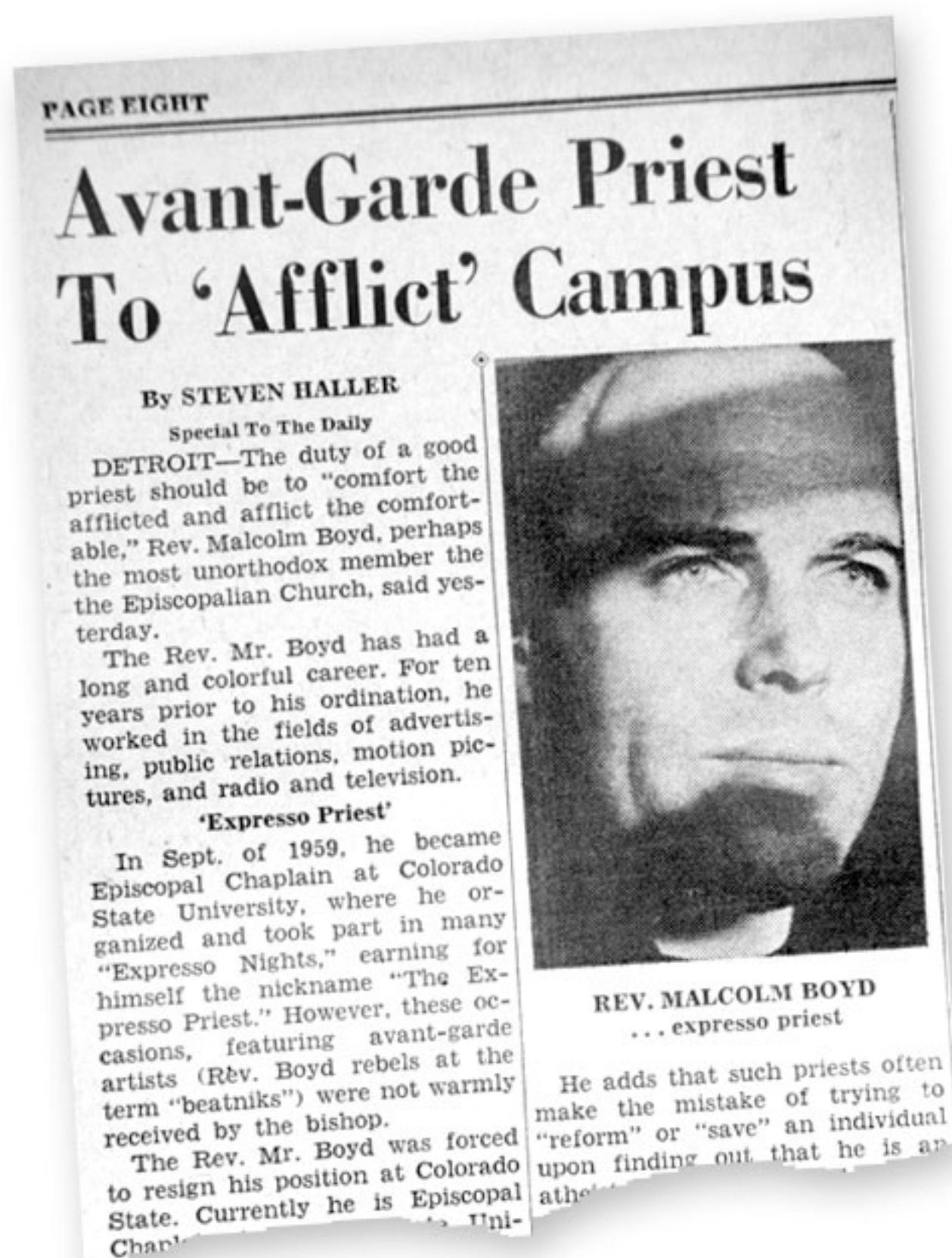
Boyd, who is writer-in-residence at the Cathedral Center of St. Paul, the headquarters of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, said he has worked closely with Thomas on the film, which will highlight his years on the front lines of the civil rights movement and the struggle to obtain equal rights for gays and lesbians as well as his ongoing efforts to revitalize the modern-day church. Before becoming a priest, Boyd founded a

production company with actress Mary Pickford and was one of the Freedom Riders.

Dubbed the "Espresso Priest" because he spoke in so many coffee shops, Boyd, who became one of the first Episcopal priests to come out publicly as gay in 1977, predicted at the opening of a month-long speaking stint at the hungry i nightclub in [San Francisco](#) in 1966 that the church as an institution would be dead in two generations unless it "comes down to earth." Today, he says he remains concerned about the viability of the church, finding it is too often aloof from the everyday concerns of ordinary people.

[South African Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu](#) has said that Boyd's "genius" has been to show that God is everywhere, "even for those who say they do not believe in God, [as reported in The Christian Science Monitor](#)."

"He was ahead of his time, being a white civil rights prophet on behalf of people of color, protesting against tyranny and war, asserting God's inclusivity for all people, including gays, and offering prayer in actions as well as words," Archbishop Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has said. Today, Boyd shares a place with Tutu as an "elder" – a "North Star" guiding younger generations "beyond treacherous waters," Tutu says.



Over the years, Boyd has written more than 30 books, including the unorthodox book of prayers entitled "Are You Running With Me, Jesus?," which became a bestseller upon its publication in 1965. His other books have included "As I Live and Breathe: Stages of an Autobiography," "Gay Priest: An Inner Journey," and "Simple Grace: A Mentor's Guide to Growing Older." Today, he continues to speak out on various social issues and writes a regular column on religion for the Huffington Post.

Thomas has written, produced and/or directed episodes of several TV series, including "COPS," for which he was nominated for an Emmy, and "Modern

Marvels.” His 2009 film “The Anatomy of [Vince Guaraldi](#)” garnered five film festival Best Documentary awards.

As [Thomas told the Episcopal News Service](#), it was the film on Guaraldi that lend him to do the Boyd documentary.

“Guaraldi composed ‘Cast Your Fate to the Wind’ and the music for ‘Peanuts’ and I realized that Malcolm worked with Vince twice in his life,” Thomas recalled. “[Vince] composed all the music for the very first jazz mass at Grace Cathedral and Malcolm did the sermon and then a month later, Malcolm did a series of performances at the hungry i [a café in San Francisco],” he recalled.

After some initial checking, Thomas discovered Boyd was alive and well and “living about two miles from me,” the filmmaker recalled. “It was a wonderful, serendipitous moment to know that one of your heroes is still alive.”



He has also written, produced and co-edited two two-hour TV specials – one on Marilyn Monroe and the other on Shirley Temple – for A&E’s [Emmy Award-winning](#) “Biography” television series – and worked with legendary investigative reporter Jack Anderson on a pair of national primetime reports on both the rise of international terrorism and the controversies surrounding President Kennedy’s assassination.
