

# UCC ROOTS

## *Remembering our History*

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### “The First Female Executive in the United Church of Christ”

Church history scholars regularly celebrate the stories of church leaders by focusing on ordained men who serve local congregations, manage denominational tasks, shape theology, and define church identity. Although lay women are often more active members in Christian churches, honoring women’s lives and recognizing their leadership has not been well balanced.

Marilyn Breitling (1933-2018) grew up in the Midwest. With her husband and children, she became active in her local Congregational Church and increasingly involved in the national life of the United Church of Christ. In the early 1970s, Breitling worked on resolutions from the Task Force on Women in Church and Society and the Advisory Commission on Women and Society in the office of the President of the UCC. In 1975 she began working on women’s concerns in the Office for Church Life and Leadership. In 1979 she became the Director of a new Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society (CCW).



Breitling had a “*wise, practical, and strategic way of seeing what was possible and how to move forward on so many issues of importance to women.*” With her kind manner, and a great sense of humor, she could speak and act in ways that everyone could hear and respond to with new understanding and motivation. People now say that she was “*truly a founding mother of the modern women’s movement in the UCC,*” and a sister to so many women and men who knew her. When the General Synod voted to elevate the Coordinating Center for Women (CCW) to an “instrumentality” (a covenanted ministry of the church), Marilyn Breitling was recognized as the denomination’s first female executive.

In 1991, after Breitling retired, she became the director of Continuing Education at Eden Theological Seminary until 1995. During her later years she reclaimed her volunteer ministry in her home church—(Samuel UCC), in Clayton, MO.

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