

UCC ROOTS

Remembering our History

April 2018

She Expanded our Awareness of Disabilities

What does it mean to be human? Throughout history people with physical and mental disabilities have been regularly ignored, and even considered less than human. It is common for communities (and even churches) to ignore or pity people with disabilities.

Virginia Kreyer (1923-2013) was born with cerebral palsy. Her parents did not allow her to use her disability as an excuse, although it was common to view children with cerebral palsy as mentally retarded. Kreyer's mind and spirit were bigger than life.

In order to move and speak more effectively, Kreyer underwent extensive physical, occupational and speech therapy. She did not give up when schools questioned her educational skills; and eventually she graduated from the University of Richmond and went on to earn a theological degree at Union Theological Seminary (NY). Still later she completed a masters in social work.

Kreyer did not grow up in the United Church of Christ, but she felt welcomed by UCC churches. In 1952 she was ordained a UCC minister. For many years she worked with various cerebral palsy organizations. In 1976, however, Kreyer decided to focus her ministry on helping churches learn more about the needs of people with disabilities.

She worked with the New York UCC Conference and in 1977 played a key role in pressing the UCC General Synod to pass a resolution entitled "The Church and Persons with Handicaps." From then on Virginia Kreyer served as a part-time consultant for what was renamed "UCC Disabilities Ministries." Twenty-five years later, the "Kreyer Award" was established to honor persons who have exhibited a pioneering spirit in the work of the UCCDM.

Kreyer often said, *"Not long ago authority was mostly limited to men. Women, people of color, and persons with disabilities were not perceived to have as much to contribute to church and society. Today we know nothing could be further from the truth!"*

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