

# UCC ROOTS

## *Remembering our History*

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September 2015

### One Uppity Woman

As a midwife in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Anne Hutchinson knew the lives of women intimately. She ministered to their medical needs, birthing and raising 16 children herself. She also ministered to their spiritual needs. But trouble was coming.

Raised in the English household of an Anglican minister, Anne Hutchinson studied scripture and theology. Over time she had questions that Anglicanism could not answer. In 1634, she and her husband followed the Rev. John Cotton to “the new world.” With her genteel birth, Hutchinson wealth, kindly manner and intelligence, she was welcomed.

As a nurse, she visited many homes. To her dismay, she discovered that many people considered good works to be the key to salvation. She began organizing house meetings for women. Colonial women’s lives were limited: women had no public voice and many were drudges. Anne’s gatherings provided social support and met spiritual needs—she summarized the week’s sermon and helped women understand it. At first, local clergy welcomed her concern for the spiritual well-being of women.

Over time, however, Anne’s women’s discussions began to criticize the teachings of the clergy. She believed that the condition of a person’s soul could not be determined by examining good works. Rather, knowledge of salvation depended upon Divine revelation. Religious leaders considered that idea heresy, undermining the clergy and challenging the established order of government. Colonial leaders with power and authority preferred a society that had outward signs of salvation, rather than trying to determine how the Holy Spirit might inform society.

Ultimately, Anne Hutchinson was tried for heresy: The authorities said, “You have stepped out of your place, you have rather bined a Husband than a Wife and a Preacher than a Hearer and a Magistrate than a Subject.” She responded: “The Lord judgeth not as man judgeth. Better to be cast out of the Church than to deny Christ.” She was banished. Yet she knew the Still Speaking God and lived her faith with conviction.

*Contributor: Davida Foy Crabtree*

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