

***Sisters of Social Service***

*Rooted in the social teachings of the Church, we are sent to be pioneers*



**Celebrating nearly 90 years** of working with and supporting people on the margins of our world through social services and advocacy



**TALES FROM THE HEART OF WELLSPRING** Stories collected and shared at Wellspring Women's Center

July 2, 2015

## **SISTER CLAIRE**

Sister Claire Graham, one of the foundresses of Wellspring, is 78 years old.

She currently works as a spiritual director out of a small office on 21<sup>st</sup> Street in Midtown, Sacramento. It is equipped with two white wicker chairs, an end table and a mini-fridge stocked with refreshments.

Sister Claire defines her work as a spiritual director as giving people the opportunity to talk about, wonder about and realize their relationship with a higher power.

“The thing that I love about it is that there are no answers,” she said. “In America, we always want to answer everything, but there are no answers.”

“I’ve always been drawn to the underdog – I think that is part of my DNA,” she said. “I have this new theory that God provides us all with certain DNA inside of us and that is what moves and shakes us through our lifetime.”

In 1987, when Sister Claire and Sister Catherine Connell founded Wellspring in a small storefront on Broadway, they decided to believe every story that their guests told them.



The original Wellspring

“We didn’t try to change people, we just tried to be with them,” said Sister Claire. “I think that there is a huge need for presence in the world, because when we just be with each other, we find the commonality and we don’t find the difference.”

**How has Wellspring impacted you personally?**

“Now, I have a whole lot of friends,” she said. “There was a woman who I still see every once in a while. She doesn’t go to Wellspring anymore, but they were one of the most problematic families in Oak Park – a family involved in murders, suicides and thievery. This woman came to see me not long ago. She came

here to the office with her boyfriend who is blind and they've been together for probably 25 years now. They came in – she with a rose, dressed in a skirt – it doesn't matter to me how people dress, but she was dressed really nicely. They just came to say, 'hi' with a rose. It was so significant to me to see that they were happily together. They weren't any better financially. They were still on welfare because neither one of them was able to get work, but they were respectful of themselves.”

Sister Claire was a social worker before she became a sister.

“What I value about my career is the ability to lessen my defenses and open my heart,” she said. “I was always focused on other people. I love people and I want people to have things that can help them be successful. I've also had to come to grips with a lot of my own demons. I feel more honest, more genuine and more whole.”

**What does healing mean to you?**

“The ability to let your heart be touched,” she said. “I think for me, today, God is not a person. God is an energy and that energy is love. Our job is to learn how to love, to receive love and to give love and when we die, we return to love. I don't know what all that means — I just know it in my heart and my head.”

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