

Sister Clare Dunn Mixdown 1.mp3

[00:00:00] **Amanda Luberto** As Women's History Month comes to a close, so too is our series Arizona HERstory, at least for this year. For our final 2023 profile, we're going to look at a woman who lived much more recently than our other women. She was driven by conscience, held a role no one like her had ever held before or since, and met a tragically early end. Our series host Kaylee Monahan has the story.

[00:00:40] **Kaely Monahan** Reverend Mother and Dear Sisters, Before leaving Carondelet, I promised to write a journal of our trip to Arizona. It seems to me that the fulfillment of this promise is almost out of date. You know, we scarcely had time to brush off our habits before opening school. Consequently, I was obliged to defer writing the events of our trip until vacation. And I would not have courage even now to commence it. Were it not that sister Euphrasia is reminding me continually of it. I have time now. It is true, but not capacity for such a task. But nevertheless, I shall do the best I can. Relying on the kind indulgence of our good sisters.

[00:01:27] **Kaely Monahan** From the Diary of Sister Monica Corrigan. "The Trek of the Seven Sisters."

[00:01:41] **Kaely Monahan** In the 1870s, Seven Sisters of the Catholic Order of Saint Joseph of Carondelet traveled to Arizona. Sister Monica was one of them. Her diary catalogs the journey from Saint Louis, Missouri, to Tucson, Arizona. Together, they opened a school next to Saint Augustine Church for the children of Tucson. Three years later, they established one for Native American children at the San Savior Mission. It is from this community that our next Arizona woman hails from. Welcome to Arizona HERstory on Valley 101. I'm host and producer Kaely Monahan. Today, we conclude the series with a story about a legislator who was truly one of a kind.

[00:02:43] **Sister Clare Dunn** First of all, I wanted to run as a sister. I did not want to be a renegade nun, so I did not wish to seek public office unless I could say that I had the permission and I had the support of my community. At first they were very open to the idea. Then they began to get cold feet. I had a campaign for campaign for office, and I had to be able to say that I was about the work of the church.

[00:03:11] **Kaely Monahan** That is the voice of Sister Clare Dunn from a tape recording. She was born in 1937 in Riverside, California. There is not much written or reported about her early years, but we do know that she joined the congregation of St Joseph in 1955 at the age of 18. When she turned 21, she attended Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles.

[00:03:37] **Catherine O'Donnell** As a sister, she was a teacher and she was brought to the Arizona Community of Sisters, which had been established in 1870. So it has its own kind of fascinating history.

[00:03:51] **Kaely Monahan** This is Catherine O'Donnell.

[00:03:52] **Catherine O'Donnell** Professor of history at Arizona State University.

[00:03:56] **Kaely Monahan** Catherine's main research area is U.S. Catholic history, and she's written numerous books on the subject, including "Jesuits in the British North American Colonies" and "Elizabeth Seton: American Saint."

[00:04:10] **Kaely Monahan** To reiterate, Clare Dunn's younger years are not well documented. It's what she did in the mid 1970s that makes her a subject for our Herstory series from 1975 to 1981. Sister Clare, a Catholic nun, served in the Arizona House of Representatives. It is incredibly rare for any Catholic religious to serve in public office. And Catherine agrees.

[00:04:39] **Catherine O'Donnell** It is incredibly uncommon. And so at the time Sister Clare served, she was the only one not just in the Arizona legislature, but I think the only sister serving in the United States. And in fact, just around the time of Sister Clare's death, the then new pope, John Paul, said that clergy should not serve in public office.

[00:05:11] **Kaely Monahan** Before we dive further into Clare's story, we need to understand her order and what was going on in the Catholic Church during her time of service. Let's start with the congregation of Saint Joseph, also known as the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

[00:05:26] **Catherine O'Donnell** Which was founded in 17th century France. It always serve the public. So they always were thinking about what do people need and how can I provide that? They have an ethos of what they call unifying love.

[00:05:46] **Kaely Monahan** Teaching became a big part of the orders mission, and it was the educational mission that brought the sisters to the United States.

[00:05:55] **Catherine O'Donnell** The Sisters of Saint Joseph were originally invited from France to start schools for the deaf in Saint Louis. That's how they ended up in the United States.

[00:06:04] **Kaely Monahan** Now, history buffs might be saying, "Wait a minute. Catholics have worked and served in public and governmental offices during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. And what about popes who were de facto rulers in Italy?" Well, you'd be correct on this point.

[00:06:22] **Catherine O'Donnell** The original theory was if a church tells you how the world should be organized, then the church should organize the world. Right. It wouldn't even make sense if you're thinking in that way to separate church and state. And so this is the case through much of European history. There's always arguments about what it should look like. But the idea that religion and politics went together was kind of accepted.

[00:06:51] **Kaely Monahan** But things began to change during the age of reason, which lasted from the late 17th century up into the early 1800s. As Catherine describes it, the idea of church and state working in tandem begins to pull apart in this era for all sorts of reasons.

[00:07:16] **Catherine O'Donnell** Through violence and through changes and political thinking that really value individual choice and begin to separate some of the rules of running the Earth from the ways that one worships God, but particularly United States. It's very interesting because you did have different groups colonizing the United States at the point that the Constitution was formed. There was no one religious group that would have formed a national church.

[00:07:49] **Kaely Monahan** You had various denominations of Christian faiths. There were beliefs held by indigenous peoples and even new Protestant faiths cropping up, such as the American Unitarian Association and the Latter Day Saints movement. With so many faiths present in the U.S., it helped promote the idea that the best way religion could thrive is by having it be separate from the state.

[00:08:15] **Catherine O'Donnell** So interestingly, in Virginia, where some of this ferment really happened, you have evangelicals arguing for the separation of church and state as strongly as you have people who might be deists, who we might think of as more conventionally prone to that and. And the early Catholic bishops. John Carroll most famously really argued the way that Catholicism can flourish is not by trying to control the state at all, but by almost competing for souls. Right. And allowing the government to be separate there. It's still vexing. Right. It's still the are people argue about.

[00:08:58] **Kaely Monahan** So in the United States, at least, the idea of a Catholic priest or nun working in government was rare, although not explicitly forbidden. Back now to Sister Clare. She went to Tucson in 1965 after obtaining her master's degree in political science. She taught in Catholic schools for nine years before even considering running for office.

[00:09:29] **Sister Pat Krommer** I had not been there very long. When Clare said to me she was considering running for office and I thought, Oh my God, the community will not, I mean, we were open to some new things, but this was going to be a real struggle.

[00:09:44] **Kaely Monahan** That's the voice of Sister Pat Krommer in a short video documentary about Sister Clare, produced by Mount Saint Mary's University. Clare's fellow sisters speak very fondly of her. Here's an extended clip from the documentary. You'll hear Sister Pat Krommer and Sister Barbara Sullivan.

[00:10:05] **Sister Pat Krommer** Sister Clare Dunn was the first sister to take office. Public office. She did a magnificent job. Clare was the real thing, and she and Judy were perfect. A great team.

[00:10:25] **Sister Barbara Sullivan** They were both ordinary and extraordinary people. Clare was a high school social studies teacher. One of the things that she did was she made the students go to a city council meeting or the Democratic Party meeting and go to the Republican Party meeting to see how government really works. And one time a student said to her sister, It's really in a mess. Why don't you run for office?

[00:10:57] **Kaely Monahan** Clare took that suggestion to heart. But as we heard earlier, she wanted the church's permission.

[00:11:03] **Sister Clare Dunn** I wanted to do it as a sister. I did not want to be a renegade nun.

[00:11:17] **Catherine O'Donnell** You can understand the hesitancy, I think, or at least I can understand the hesitancy. So the community has an ethos of charity and relationship, right? They didn't understand charity as doing things for other people, but as living in community with other people and tending to their needs and benefiting spiritually from doing that. Is politics the realm to do that, or is politics too much a realm of backroom deals and argumentation and money? Right. And, you know, I think it's easy to understand sort of qualms about that.

[00:11:59] **Kaely Monahan** For Sister Clare, serving in the legislature was an extension of what her order, the Sisters of Saint Joseph, have always done to help people and the community.

[00:12:11] **Catherine O'Donnell** My understanding is that that community was influenced by Vatican II, which is this sort of turning of the Catholic Church more outward to the world for context.

[00:12:25] **Kaely Monahan** The Second Vatican Council or Vatican II was the 21st Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church. It was convened by now Saint John Paul the 23rd, and lasted for four sessions from 1962 until 1965. It produced a series of documents to help direct the life of the church in the 20th century and beyond. Catholics will recognize the most obvious changes being a turning of the altar so that the priest faces the congregation during the mass instead of facing the crucifix or tabernacle, and a change to bring more local languages into the service. And lessening or even abandoning Latin. But Vatican II was more than just changing some of the outward forms of worship at its heart. Much of it was about how the Catholic Church should respond to the modern world.

[00:13:25] **Catherine O'Donnell** And as a part of that, people in religious life were encouraged to understand themselves as living. One of many ways of living out the gospel right and encouraged to perhaps be in the world and live out the Gospels in practical ways. So her community took that like to heart and began really reading the Gospels again with their social mission in mind, thinking about their founding great in 1650, and France, which had that spirit to it. And apparently Sister Clare then fairly early on as a teacher, would encourage her students to go to city council meetings, to go to maybe a meeting of the Democrats, meeting of the Republicans. Her community was really moved by the civil rights movement and this assassination of Martin Luther King, for example. And then it was in the early seventies that Sister Clare decided that she might want to serve in the legislature.

[00:14:43] **Kaely Monahan** Social justice, which has always been a part of the Catholic Church's mission and teachings, was given new emphasis in Vatican II, and it was taken up by Sister Clare in a radical way. Here's what her fellow sisters, Pat Krommer and Callista Ray remember about Clare's appeal to their superiors.

[00:15:02] **Sister Pat Krommer** Mary Bridget was the provincial when Clare wanted to run and the community was really divided on whether she should or shouldn't. And Mary Bridget really listened.

[00:15:12] **Sister Callista Ray** She asked absolutely the right question. "Clare, Is this a matter of conscience for you?" Clare said yes, and that was the story.

[00:15:28] **Kaely Monahan** Now came the challenge of actually mounting a campaign. Here's sisters Louise McDonald's and Pat Krommer.

[00:15:35] **Louise McDonald** Sister Clare didn't have any professional staff. Sister Judy was her campaign manager and also full time legislative aide.

[00:15:44] **Sister Pat Krommer** Judy was really excellent at writing. Clare got the ideas. Judy brought them. Several sisters came during the summer because they were teachers, and so they had the time off.

[00:15:55] **Kaely Monahan** According to Sister Pat. Clare wouldn't accept donations larger than \$100. So the nuns had their work cut out for them to raise enough funds.

[00:16:05] **Sister Pat Krommer** We got lots of people who contributed for the first time in their life, and they sent us \$25.

[00:16:11] **Kaely Monahan** Clare and her fellow sisters made calls and knocked on doors.

[00:16:15] **Sister Pat Krommer** As we walked. One of the things we discovered there was some people are not going to vote for nuns, and some of those people were Catholics who did not think nuns should be in politics. But for the most part, that was not the issue for people. They wanted to know where she stood on the issues. The issues were the elderly were really concerned about their health care and the poor. The ERA, which of course never passed education, was a huge issue, and especially children with special needs. In the sanctuary movement, immigration at that particular time wasn't I mean, it sounds like today she was very clear that you didn't have to have money to come to her office and talk to any groups that invited her. She went to talk to them to help them to be with them.

[00:17:00] **Kaely Monahan** In 1974, Sister Clare was elected to represent Legislative District 13 in Tucson. She ran as a Democrat, which might come as a surprise for some. Catherine O'Donnell explained to me that initially many Catholics embraced the Democratic Party.

[00:17:18] **Catherine O'Donnell** So some of this emerges from the history of immigration. You had this influx of Catholics from Ireland, to some extent from Germany. There was a Democratic and a Republican Party then in the mid-19th century, and it was the Democrats who embraced these immigrants. Some said, okay, we want you to vote for us. We are not too upset by your differences and culture. We're not too upset at your drinking effort like and Irish Catholics became very important to the Democrats and as did some Germans. I mean, my family is part of this history. I feel like I was in college before I realized that you could choose your political party. Like my family were Irish Catholic Democrats. That was just like it just seemed like part of the identity. There are all kinds of changes in the mid and late 20th century. Roe v Wade changed the political landscape as it changed the cultural landscape. And emerging from that began an alliance between some evangelicals who even in the quite recent past, would have thought of Catholics as not even Christian. Right there, there's a great deal of prejudice.

[00:18:48] **Kaely Monahan** Roe v Wade just passed the year before Sister Clare took office. There are no known reports about her stance on abortion.

[00:18:57] **Catherine O'Donnell** And the ERA was her central issue. So the Equal Rights Amendment was the controversy that she took on. She championed it. She gave a ferocious speech in the legislature after it was voted down. She was indignant that it sort of died in committee. Okay. She said things in committee, but then the Republicans, through a series of maneuvers, brought it to the floor nonetheless, just so it could be publicly voted down. She gave a speech objecting to those maneuvers and also saying equal Rights Amendment will not destroy the family. And she said those who think that it might transform the world in other ways, that it might be threatening, they might not be wrong, but redistributing power is threatening. But it's a good kind of threat, a healthy kind of threat. And she was just very direct in her language. She called sexism the model of oppression. She wanted the past and she worked with Sandra Day O'Connor, who was a

Republican in the legislature, to forward that. So that was the controversial issue that I see her very strongly attached to. And interestingly, Roe v Wade does not come up. I imagine somebody could tell us about this.

[00:20:33] **Kaely Monahan** But Catherine admitted she hasn't found that person. Sister Margaret McGraw, who was in the same community as Sister Clare, remembers a very poignant moment when she and her fellow sisters joined the community in praying for social justice.

[00:21:00] **Sister Margaret McGraw** When Martin Luther King Jr. was shot. Sister Clare Dunn, Rachael and Judy and myself, we were the only ones not of color down at their church in Tucson. Praying with them that night. This is how we became alive to the social justice issues. You had to change your thinking.

[00:21:26] **Kaely Monahan** A former student of Sister Clare, told the Arizona Daily Star in 2017 that Clare and her students were always thinking and discussing fairness and inequality, and Sister Clare taught her students to always show compassion and support to those who had less. During her first year in office, she introduced 29 bills and co-sponsored nine others. Sister Clare was very concerned for the working class, particularly those who could barely make ends meet or were unemployed. She was a champion for increased access to voting and she supported the measures to enable voting by mail. Clare also sought to restore voting rights to freed prisoners who had met sentencing on parole requirements, as well as push to have ballot language be easy to read and understand. Plus, she wanted it to be printed in Spanish alongside English. Sister Clare also worked to provide help to the undocumented and to people who newly immigrated from Mexico. She supported the farm workers of America's boycotts and even made public appearances with Cesar Chavez when he visited Tucson. Women's and children's rights were another one of her concerns, along with education during her tenure. She introduced legislation that proposed coverage of textbook fees by the state rather than the family. Another one of her first bills introduced a no grocery tax in Arizona as a tax cut for the poor. It finally passed two years after her death and remains a popular law today. Sister Clare co-sponsored the bill initiating January 15th as Martin Luther King Day and recognizing it as a legal holiday in April 1976. Her bill, which outlawed elected and appointed officials use of political influence to circumvent the state's personnel system, became law. This was in addition to her fiery passion to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, which still has yet to be ratified by the state of Arizona.

[00:23:54] **Sister Clare Dunn** I always said that religious life is a great training ground for the Arizona state legislature.

[00:23:58] **Kaely Monahan** Those who knew her say Clare was not meek. She had a backbone and fought tirelessly for the good of all Arizonans.

[00:24:08] **Catherine O'Donnell** People expected her to be a puny nun. That's the way to used a puny nun. And she was not. She was absolutely active. And there just is a tremendous amount of respect for her.

[00:24:22] **Kaely Monahan** In an interview with the Arizona Daily Star on November 17th, 1974, Sister Clare said women don't fit into the power structure the way men have exercised it. Anything pertaining to human rights, particularly the era that is the Equal Rights Amendment and appropriations for daycare, removal of sales tax on food and passage of more equitable tax bills all around is of particular interest to women. Tragically,

Sister Clare's life was cut short. She and her aide, Sister Judy Marie Lovchik, died in a two car collision on Interstate 10 in Marana, just north of Tucson. They were driving south when a drunk driver on the wrong side of the highway collided with them head on. Both women were 46 years old. Sisters Clare and Judy served in the legislature from 1975 until 1981. Her fellow sisters, Pat Cromer and Louise McDonnell, recalled the tragedy.

[00:25:55] **Sister Barbara Sullivan** Now, when she died, she had the most name recognition of any politician in the state, including the governor, because...I'm sorry.

[00:26:12] **Sister Pat Krommer** They were killed in an auto accident. A drunk driving on the wrong side of the road.

[00:26:20] **Sister Barbara Sullivan** Clare and Judy had finished the legislative session June of 1981. So they took a vacation. It was when coming back that they were both killed.

[00:26:30] **Sister Barbara Sullivan** After all these years. Because she had done so much for so many people. I really felt I was a part of what they were doing. You didn't have to be the person that was doing this, but being a part of and being supportive of and going to meetings made a big difference. It takes many people to it to get people elected. This is from one of our talks. We will need courage. We will need energy. We will need vision. We will need to be at ease with ourselves and our decisions. Above all, like the psalmist, we will need to keep our eyes fixed on the Lord, our God until God lets us rest. And then we will know, as we have always known, that the effort was worth the gift of our lives, the best of our years, the length of our days.

[00:27:44] **Kaely Monahan** After sisters Clare and Judy's deaths, an outpouring of grief, adoration and recognition welled up from around Arizona. Bruce Wheeler, who was elected to the House in District 13 the same year as Sister Clare, opened the 1982 legislative session by calling sister, quote, the conscience of the legislature. Sister Clare was one of the very last Catholic sisters to serve in public office. In 1983, two years after her death, the Vatican forbade sisters or any Catholic religious to run for political office.

[00:28:24] **Catherine O'Donnell** I think people should care about Sister Clare Dunne because she cared about people. So she took the ethos of her community unifying love and she thought, Can I exemplify this in a steak house? Can I bring this purity of purpose to the complicated world of political compromise and deals and backroom, you know, arguments? And by all accounts, she did. And she clearly didn't win every argument. She didn't pass every bill she wanted to pass. But she left a lasting model that there's no excuse for not having a clear purpose and for not believing that you can improve the world. However, you see, the world should be improved and kind of dedicating the length of your days to that. So it's the community, the effort, the love of the women around her, right? The love of the other sisters of Saint Joseph and the respect that she elicited and people who might not want to have respect for her. Right. Or at least didn't want to agree with her. That is such a legacy and and so moving. I think. So I, I would hope that people remember that.

[00:30:07] **Amanda Luberto** Man. I've been working all year, but I had to cancel my time and, you know, like the level of like, I don't want to be something society wants me to strive to be the male and the gene and the G. So mountains.

[00:30:26] **Kaely Monahan** Sister Clare Dunn was inducted into the Arizona Women's Hall of Fame in 2017, 36 years after her death, she.

[00:30:52] **Amanda Luberto** Wow. Thank you so much, Kelly, for telling us that story. I have lived in Arizona almost my whole life. I've never heard of her. Like so many of the other women we've been talking about. I've learned so much in the last four weeks. But I wanted to ask you, Kelly, specifically, since this is sort of your brainchild, what did you learn or discover over these four weeks that really surprised you?

[00:31:15] **Kaely Monahan** Well, you know, like you said, we've covered so much ground. Each of these women that we took a deep dive into are just so incredible in their own way. It's I love the breadth of women that we covered from business, entrepreneurs, criminals, artists and legislators. I think I was most impressed by actually Pearl Hart story because we finally, at least for me, have really heard about her. She's just kind of been almost like this fictional character in some regards. And hats off to our intern Thomas France for finding John Boston Dekker that he was able to track down her story. I was just so invested in that tale, maybe because she is definitely the anti-hero type.

[00:32:09] **Amanda Luberto** And that also gave sort of like a true crime podcast aspect to our show, which we don't usually get to do.

[00:32:16] **Kaely Monahan** But I loved covering Ayra Hackett It again, like she's a role model to me, being a journalist, a groundbreaker, a community leader in so many ways. The fact that she just burned so bright for the Phenix community, for the black Phenix community, and for such a short period of time, I mean, in a way, her light has not gone out. At least it shines brightly still for me and Mary Colter, too. Like, Oh my gosh, I had no idea how interesting her story was.

[00:32:51] **Amanda Luberto** One of the things I love about doing Valley one on one is that when you get to find those stories where people that you're interviewing at the end say, thank you so much for covering this, thank you for bringing light to it, it really means a lot. And I feel I mean, I can't speak for you, but every person I talked to about Mary Colter was just really thankful that we were giving her the the space and the time of day that they all thought she deserved. And that always, you know, warms my heart.

[00:33:21] **Kaely Monahan** Yeah, I got the same definitely with Ayra and with Sister Clare Dunn's story, I love the idea that with Sister Clare's story, it doesn't feel like it fits. You know, a Catholic nun serving in government on the legislature. And that dichotomy just made her story really fascinating. But I'm excited to have presented this story to all of you listeners to the state of Arizona. There are just so many, many stories like these ones that are just underreported, under appreciated. And that's why I wanted to do this series. Like at the beginning of the series, I said I have felt this is a very important thing to do, to tell the stories of these Arizona women because as honorable and laudable as the Sandra Day O'Connor's and Rose Moffat's are, there are so many more.

[00:34:18] **Amanda Luberto** Yeah. And I think one of the best parts about the Arizona HERstory series is that telling these women story doesn't take away from how spectacular and revolutionary people like Rose Moffat and Sarah Day O'Connor are. I mean, those are undeniable pioneers of our state and just full forces, but their stories are so much more familiar. And something we like to do here at Valley. What I wanted to is tell you something you may never have known before, and that's why we love to answer your questions. And you come to us with something that you're curious about and we try to find the answers. And I think that this falls right in line with our methods and our mantra here at Valley 101 of

just like trying to tell these unknown stories. So that being said, can we expect it again in March of 2024?

[00:35:12] **Kaely Monahan** Absolutely. This is something I want to keep carrying on our valley, what I want for as long as possible until if we ever run out of amazing women in our communities. It does break my heart a little bit that Women's History Month is only four weeks. Sometimes we're lucky we'll get an extra Monday in there and have five weeks. But doing these stories, I've had people say, Oh, you should also cover this person or you need to look at this woman. And I'm like, Oh, I want to, I want to. So I also ask, you know, dear listeners, if there's any women. From Arizona history that you think have not been given the proper due, let us know. We'll definitely add it to the list. Well, again, thank you all so much for listening to Valley one on one and coming with us on this special series, Arizona HERstory. like we said, we plan to make this an annual series and be back next March with many more amazing Arizona women's stories.

[00:36:18] **Amanda Luberto** We also plan to do more unique series here at Valley 101 throughout the year. So if you have any ideas or questions, you think we should explore something that you think takes weeks to really dive into? Let us know. Send us a note at Valley10.AZCentral.com.

[00:36:37] **Kaely Monahan** And if you like this series, then leave it a review that helps us reach more listeners like you.

[00:36:44] **Amanda Luberto** And in general, remember to rate and share our podcast Valley 101.

[00:36:49] **Kaely Monahan** Special thanks to ASU's Catherine O'Donnell, and to Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles, who produced the mini documentary on Sister Clare. You can find it on YouTube. Just search for CSJ Oral History Project: Advocates for Justice: Sister Clare Dunn and Sister Judy Luvchik. This has been Arizona. HERstory on Valley 101. I'm Kaely Monahan.

[00:37:14] **Amanda Luberto** And I'm Amanda Luberto. Thank you so much for listening. We'll see you next week.