News
Religious Life



Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt, longtime chaplain of the Loyola University Chicago men's basketball team and campus icon, gives a thumbs up after the team defeated the Nevada Wolf Pack in the semifinals of the South regional of the 2018 NCAA Tournament in Atlanta. On Aug. 21, 2025, Sister Jean celebrated her 106th birthday.

(OSV News/USA TODAY Sports/Reuters/Brett Davis)

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It's been more than seven years since Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt became a household name virtually overnight.

Then — five months shy of turning 99 — Sr. Jean captured the hearts of college basketball fans when, as team chaplain, she inspired Loyola University of Chicago to a Final Four berth in the 2018 NCAA men's basketball tournament. Known for her constant positivity and even offering strategic game-day suggestions, she was quickly embraced by appreciative players and staff as an honorary assistant coach.

Seven years later, the sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who entered the order in 1937, continues to elevate the hearts and minds of the young and old alike.

On Aug. 21, Sr. Jean celebrated her 106th birthday. Still officially listed as team chaplain but no longer able to attend most games due to health issues, the former high school basketball player from San Francisco's St. Paul's High School shared a heartfelt but practical message on Loyola's website. She thanked supporters for standing by her through a nine-decade ministry of education, civil rights awareness, spiritual guidance, and outspoken advocacy for love, service and gratitude.

Apologizing for her absence, she encouraged the Loyola community to "enjoy the treats and the new Sr. Jean pin." Then, turning to the students, she offered her trademark encouragement: "Make new friends. Talk to your old friends. Enjoy your move-in and your preparations for class," she said. "I will be with you in spirit and love and prayer. These things are very important in your life as you adjust to your new 'home away from home' at Loyola University.

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"Your parents have entrusted you to our care. We appreciate that trust. We know that you will live by it and that you will become the people that you want to be, the people that God has decided you will be. Yes, you have to be yourself."

Recognizing her nearly three decades at Loyola as "wonderful," she urged students to let their faith guide their future: "Let your dreams become reality," she said. "Don't let anybody stop you. You are the future leaders of our churches, our schools, our country, and our world."

Loyola president Mark Reed described her ongoing impact, highlighting that the community celebrates "not only this remarkable milestone, but also the wisdom, hope, and joy Sr. Jean shares so generously with us," Reed said. "Her ministry of presence has touched thousands of lives — students, faculty, staff, alumni. We are deeply grateful."

Her birthday brought thousands of greetings from around the world, including many from abroad. Messages poured in through Loyola's board, Facebook and even sports platforms.

One admirer shared, "You inspired me to have a career helping people be healthy in mind and body." Another revealed she had been named after Sr. Jean. A 2018 Loyola graduate cited the aforementioned basketball season with a simple, "You had a direct line to God."

That legendary 2018 tournament still stands as a highlight of Sr. Jean's ministry of presence. Entering the NCAA playoffs as an 11-seed, Loyola stunned the basketball world with dramatic upsets over Miami, Tennessee and Nevada by a collective four points before defeating Kansas State to reach the Final Four for the first time since their 1963 national championship season. Though their storybook run ended against

Michigan, it felt to many like something greater than basketball was at work.

Since then, Sr. Jean's influence has only grown. From a Sr. Jean bobblehead that fetches hundreds of dollars online to "Sr. Jean pins" and her bestselling memoir, "Wake Up With Purpose," tangible reminders of her legacy surround the Loyola community.

In Loyola's Gentile Arena, a banner hangs as a tribute to both her spirit and the program she loves. Its unequivocal message is short and clear: "Worship, Work, Win."