

Eulogy for Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM: A Living Ode to God's Love
Madonna Della Strada Chapel
Thursday, October 16, 2025

We gather in Madonna Della Strada Chapel to honor Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM; we gather in an atmosphere of joy edged with sadness; we gather in the deep human place where death meets resurrection. In this chapel where, by her own admission Sister Jean felt closest to God, we gather to celebrate her life: a living ode to God's love.

Dolores Bertha Schmidt was born in San Francisco, California, on August 21, 1919, the first child of Joseph and Bertha Bowman Schmidt. Brothers Edward and Raymond completed the family. From her birth, Sr. Jean was instilled with belief in the goodness of God. In her words, "My mom told us, 'We need to love God back because God made you out of love.' My father would add, 'I looked at the earth and the trees and the water and knew that only God could make such beautiful things.'"

Jean fondly describes a family-owned ark docked in the San Francisco Bay where her extended family gathered for vacations. That experience of family as community inspired her third-grade dream: "I would pray, 'Dear God, help me understand what I should do, but please tell me that I should become a BVM sister.'" Firmly grounded in her dream Jean stepped off the ark into the BVM Community. Upon graduation from St. Paul's High School Jean entered the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 8, 1937. She received the name Jean Dolores at her reception on March 19, 1938, and made her vows on March 19, 1940. Years later she marvels, "When I look back, I can't believe that the dream that first came to me as a young girl put me on such a gratifying, godly path. All I ever wanted to do was serve God and teach children."

For 20 years Jean Dolores taught elementary school children at St. Vincent in Chicago, St. Bernard in Los Angeles, St. Charles Borromeo in North Hollywood, and St. Brendan in Los Angeles where she also served as principal. She recalls rambunctious Patrick whom she converted by turning him upside down so he could proudly demonstrate the concept of inverted fractions; Roger who was blind but who, thanks to Jean, aced the scholarship exam for a local high school; and Roger Mahony who became a cardinal in the Catholic Church. We glimpse the wide reach of her heart as she agonized the release of the atomic bomb and grieved the internment of the Japanese people; engaged students in mock political elections and encouraged them to see geography as an essential exploration of diverse cultures. Serving as teacher and principal, sometimes simultaneously; conducting scholarship programs; coaching sports teams; training altar boys, all while pursuing her BA degree from Mount St. Mary's, Los Angeles, and her MA in education from Loyola, Los Angeles, Jean's life was a testament to her inexhaustible energy. With that characteristic twinkle in her eye, she sums it up: "Feeling connected to my students was like oxygen to me. When you love what you do, it never really feels like work."

In 1961, Jean received an assignment to Mundelein College. We smile now at her response: "What will I ever do there?" At Mundelein Jean taught in the education department; supervised student teachers; served as assistant and acting dean, director of the summer session, the Weekend College, student employment, and the Coffey Hall Residence. She met with students to plan effective ways of protesting injustice, companioned them through the assassination of President Kennedy, the shootings at Kent State University, the challenges of the Vietnam War, and the changes of Vatican II. In the process Jean revealed her own heart's desire for racial and gender equity, peace without war, and an inclusive Church. In addition to her ministry at Mundelein, Jean served as associate director of scholastics for young BVMs living at the Scholasticate and completing degrees at Mundelein. She sensed when someone was going through a time of loneliness, a sorrow in their family, struggles with their studies or their vocation, or simply needed a break from the intensity of it all. At Mundelein or in the Scholasticate, Jean was first and foremost a veritable presence of mighty kindness.

The move to Mundelein brought Jean close to Loyola University. Mundelein and Loyola shared multiple resources including campus grounds and professors. On a deeper level, the two institutions shared an affinity of spirit. In the way of their founders, Mary Frances Clarke and Ignatius of Loyola, the BVMs and the Jesuits claimed a common mission: seeing and loving God in all that is. Jean felt that kinship. And so, in 1991, when, due to multiple socio-economic factors, it became apparent that Mundelein could not survive as an independent college, she was a significant bridge in facilitating the difficult affiliation of Mundelein with Loyola. Jean became the assistant dean in the Mundelein College of Loyola, and eventually an assistant vice president and academic vice president. Most of all she served as a calm and stabilizing presence amid major transition. She affirms, "There were so many changes that it was hard for me to wrap my head around it. The key is to keep our faith, both in ourselves and in God."

In the fall of 1994 Jean became the chaplain of the Ramblers' men's basketball team. Jean and the Ramblers were made for each other and eventually the whole world would know it. Jean remembers the amazing 2018 run to the Final Four, the miracle "Sister Jean Bounce" basket, the team-executed passes, the messages from around the globe, the stunning apparition of fame with its photos and interviews. Yet, the electricity between Jean and the Ramblers was about more than a singular stellar season; it was about the perennial experience of exceptional human community. She remembers a player anxious about going home to a parental divorce, another who was often on the bench but whose enthusiasm encouraged the team. She remembers the team mascot anonymous under his Lu Wolf disguise but known to her whom he trusted with his life. She remembers the coaches, exceptional human beings recruiting players whose first credential was that they were good people. She remembers the fans and circling the arena with her thanks after every game. She remembers the media who saw something winning in the Ramblers no matter what the score. Most of all, Jean remembers the team. "The only reason people were talking about me was because of what the team had accomplished. I loved talking about the Ramblers, and I wanted the whole world to appreciate what these kids were doing."

Beyond the Ramblers, Jean has been with and for the whole extended Loyola University community: Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Deans, Faculty, Students, Alums, Benefactors, and Trustees. As woman of wisdom, prayer, and compassion, she has been advisor, and confidant, the heartbeat of God's friendship at the heart of Loyola. And it is for that she wants to be remembered: "I have often been referred to as 'friend to many.' That was my main job title, and I loved it." Through the years at multiple events, class reunions and her own birthday parties, lines of friends formed to greet Jean. As each one approached, Jean called us by name and shared a memory. Even as we remember Jean, the miracle is that a heart so full of friends remembers us.

Reflecting on her entrance into the BVM community 88 years ago, Jean acknowledges, "I was prepared for a lifetime commitment. Anything less than total devotion would not have worked." We are here today, blessed by her commitment and gifted by her devotion, all of us touched by her relentless passion for life and love. It is that same passion that, even as her physical energy diminished, made it hard for Jean to surrender fully into receiving the love that surrounded her: the community at The Clare, her faithful caregivers and medical professionals, her ever affectionate BVM sisters, Loyola friends, and family. After over a century of being the giver of love, it was difficult to make the transition from being love to being loved. Until in the quiet darkness of October 9, God enveloped Jean with a love impossible to resist; and she let go to receive an eternity of infinite love.

Jean wrote, "God has blessed me with an amazing life. I can't wait to see what God has in store for me next." The scripture readings Jean has chosen for this liturgy give us a glimpse into what she anticipated in faith and is experiencing now. She is at peace abiding with God in love. She tells us not to grieve or be troubled because she is in one of the many mansions in God's house and even assures us that we know the place well. And we do. Her mansion is a replica of her office on the first floor of Loyola's Damen Student Center. It has large clear windows and a wide-open door through which she can see the residents of heaven, not passing by but lined up for a visit with her. The line literally stretches into eternity. The smile on Jean's glowing face framed in her signature purple and gold Loyola scarf confirms that, for her, this is truly the beatific vision. Enjoy it, Jean, forever.

The citations in this eulogy are from Wake Up with Purpose, Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt with Seth Davis, Harper Select, Brooklyn, New York, 2023.

Mary Ann Zollmann, BVM