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Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt, the Loyola University men's basketball chaplain and school celebrity, sits for a portrait in the Joseph J. Gentile Arena on Jan. 23 in Chicago. (AP Photo/Jessie Wardarski)

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At age 103, Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt awakes daily at 5 a.m. She sits up quickly to avoid going to sleep again — "I've got too much to do," she says. After prayers for the day ahead, she reads the Gospel on her tablet.

"I guess there aren't too many 103-year-old nuns using iPads these days — there aren't too many 103-year-olds, period," she writes in her memoir that will be published Feb. 28. "But I'm pretty comfortable with modern technology. I've always said, 'If you're not moving forward, you're going to get left behind real quick.' Adaptability is my superpower."

In *Wake Up with Purpose: What I've Learned in My First Hundred Years*, Schmidt tells her life story, offers spiritual guidance and shares some of the lessons she's learned.

The beloved Catholic nun captured the sports world's imagination and became something of a folk hero as the chaplain for the Loyola Chicago men's basketball team that reached the NCAA Final Four in 2018.

She has been featured by newspapers and TV stations across America. Her NCAA news conference, she was told, had more journalists than Tom Brady drew at the Super Bowl. Her likeness appears on socks, bobbleheads, even a Lego statue at her gallery in Loyola's art museum. She sees the attention as a holy opportunity to tell her story and share what she's learned; to help others wake up with purpose. Among her priorities, there's little that she enjoys more than talking with young people.

"I love life so much and enjoy being with young people," she told The Associated Press. "They're the ones who keep me going because they bring such joy into my life — and they keep you updated on what's happening in their world."



Loyola University women's basketball players greet Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt with a handshake after practice Jan. 23 in Chicago. (AP Photo/Jessie Wardarski)

She arrived in a wheelchair for the interview at her office in the university's student center. She wore purple Nike Air Max sneakers with the words "Sister" and "Jean" written on the back, and her maroon and gold Loyola scarf that often gets compared to Harry Potter's. She smiled warmly and waved to prospective students and shook hands with current students, asking them about their classes.

"What's your dream?" she asked some of them.

Samuel Grebener, a 19-year-old freshman, told her he was thinking about medical school. They then talked about their shared love for the Loyola Ramblers. "She knows more about basketball than me," Grebener said.

It was 9 a.m., and by then, she had already written her usual scouting report and emailed the players on the team to congratulate them on a victory.

"I believe this was a turning point and that we're now in a winning streak" she wrote. "Our next game will be challenging, but just keep working hard. I will be there in prayer and in spirit and bless your hands virtually."

In her office — surrounded by bobbleheads, posters and pins with her image — she studied game stats carefully in preparation to meet with the team at practice. Before a pizza lunch at the nearby cafeteria, she met other students.

Catharina Baeten, a 20-year-old-junior, told Schmidt she had decided to attend Loyola because of its excellent programs in psychology and women-and-gender studies. "And also because of you," she told the nun.

"Everyone loves Sister Jean," Baeten said later, recalling that she first met the nun during a tour of Loyola when she was in high school. "There's not a single unkind bone in her body and she represents our values ... she's the embodiment of compassion."

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Born in San Francisco in 1919, Schmidt grew up in a devoutly Catholic family. She witnessed the impact of the Great Depression, World War II and the building of the Golden Gate Bridge, which she recalls crossing on foot when it opened in 1937.

Her religious calling, she said, came at the age of 8. She was in third grade when she met a kind, joyful teacher who belonged to the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Brimming with admiration, she would pray every day: "Dear God, help me understand what I should do, but please tell me I should become a BVM sister," she recounts in her memoir, co-written with sportswriter/broadcaster Seth Davis.

"I guess God listened to me on that one," she writes.

She followed her calling to the order's motherhouse in Dubuque, Iowa, where she made her vows. She went on to teach at Catholic schools in Chicago and southern California, where she also coached girls' basketball, before she ended at Mundelein College — on the Chicago lakefront —in the 1960s. The school became affiliated with Loyola in 1991, and Schmidt was hired to help students with the transition.



A bobblehead of Loyola University men's basketball chaplain and school celebrity Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt on display in her office (AP Photo/Jessie Wardarski)

In 1994, she was asked to help student basketball players boost their grades — "the booster shooter" she called herself, and later that year, she was named chaplain of the men's basketball team. The role, she writes in her memoir, became "the most transformational and transcendent position" of her life.

"Sports are very important because they help develop life skills," she said. "And during those life skills, you're also talking about faith and purpose." Her motto: "Worship, Work, Win."

"I know that God will call me when he wants me. So, I just feel I have a lot more work to do," she said.

During a recent practice, she watched from the sideline in her wheelchair. On a break, the players on the men's and women's teams took turns shaking her hand.

"Her consistency is incredible," said senior forward Tom Welch, 22. "She does it every day, every game. She brings the same energy to our pregame prayers."

She also breaks down the strengths and weaknesses of the rivals in her scouting report. She's "letting us know who's good at shooting, who to send to the free throw line ... pretty in-depth details," Welch said. "And then sometimes, you know, she'll make us laugh, feel good for a game."

The laughter has been needed this season. The team is 9-16 overall and last in the Atlantic 10 conference with a 3-10 record.

Allison Guth, the women's basketball coach, called Schmidt a legend.

"Every day I walk in the office, and she's in her office. You talk about being there at 103. It's because it's a passion for her. It's about love," Guth said. "I think they should be telling stories about her forever."

Read this next: Q & A with Sr. Jean Dolores Schmidt on life returning to normal after the Final Four