



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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### “The Flock”

John 10:11-8  
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I want a good shepherd. Our souls are drawn to a good shepherd. That’s the best reason I can give for why Sister Jean’s bobblehead sold out.

Sister Jean Dolores-Schmidt is a 98-year-old nun. She leads the Loyola Chicago men’s basketball team in prayer before every game. She has been their chaplain for 25 years, long before this spring’s publicity and fame. Last month, as the Ramblers made their improbable march to the Final Four, she became college basketball’s most recognized new personality.

Within 48 hours of its release, Sister Jean’s bobblehead became the best seller in the history of the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum.<sup>1</sup> Whether we are religious or not, our souls are drawn to a good shepherd. People love Sister Jean. She’s disarming and sassy.

She’s boosted the popularity of Roman Catholicism online. In the Twitter account Lit Catholic Memes, an interviewer asks: “What did you give up for Lent?” Sister Jean answers without missing a beat, “Losing.”<sup>2</sup>

And if being sassy isn’t enough, Sister Jean knows basketball. She functions in an arena where we don’t expect to find God. Besides being the grandmother everyone wants, she’s an incredible good shepherd.

Except, if there’s one thing Sister Jean knows at the core of her being, it’s that she isn’t the good shepherd. There’s only one good shepherd, and it’s not her. Sister Jean knows that she is simply part of God’s flock. She is a sheep among sheep, in a flock which is bigger than her basketball team and Loyola, and even bigger than the Roman Catholic Church. There are many others in her flock: her team *and* the opposing team and, for a while this spring, the whole American public.

Each year on the fourth Sunday in the season of Easter, we hear Psalm 23 and a Gospel reading about Jesus the good shepherd. It is one of most beautiful and reassuring images of Jesus. The good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep, who knows the sheep by name, who leads them beside still waters. Jesus, the good shepherd, who tends the flock.

Sister Jean knows she’s part of this flock. And she treats others as if they are part of the flock, too, in ways that help them know they are loved and valued by God. She doesn’t have a savior complex. She knows this isn’t about her. She knows she needs the community and new life offered by God as much as the next person.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/college/ct-spt-sister-jean-bobblehead-record-loyola-20180326-story.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-43554655>

There's so much more to Sister Jean than her bobblehead fame. For decades, she has been an educator: a principal, coach, and teacher. She lives in residence halls and talks every day with students.<sup>3</sup> She leads a weekly prayer group for them. She knows that the kid on the team who sits on the bench, who only gets two minutes of playing time during an entire season is just as valuable as the basketball team's star player.

We're drawn to someone like Sister Jean who accepts us as we are. The great thing about her is that she finds ways to point beyond herself to the good shepherd. She knows who her shepherd is and she reminds others that they are part of the flock. Not only people who go to church, but everyone and anyone.

Sister Jean knows her place in the flock. She understands herself as a part of the larger whole. She knows we are accountable to the good shepherd, and also accountable to one another.

Former Broad Street Pastor John Buchanan tells the story of a couple planning for retirement. They work with determination and creativity to provide for their child, a young woman, now in her late twenties, with Down Syndrome.

They investigate, research and interview. At last they find the right group home with appropriate oversight. They work with public and private agencies to find her meaningful employment. When all of this is in place they address what for many of us is a simple detail, but for them, the toughest hurdle of all: transportation. They worry how their daughter will travel daily, by herself, from home to job and then back again.

So they take turns, following the bus on which she is a passenger, on her way to work, out in the world. She gets on a bus, finds her seat, takes care of her belongings, and watches for the correct bus stop. She feels secure. And she's totally unaware of how secure she is, because one of her parents is in a car, discreetly following the bus, without her being aware of it, all the way from the corner bus stop to her place of work and then back home again after that work is done. They do that morning and night, until they know she can do it on her own.<sup>4</sup>

These parents grasp the hard truth that they have a finite amount of time to shepherd their daughter. This awareness is their darkest valley, their place of worry and fear. They know they need to entrust her to others. So they explore other flocks. They do the hard work of transitioning out of the role of shepherd, all the while tamping down their fears.

Because they know no plans are perfect. Things happen. Maybe one day she'll miss the bus. Or the bus itself will break down. There are real dangers out there: hired hands that run away, wolves that snatch and scatter. It is hard to entrust those we love to the good shepherd. We are realists. We know the taste of fear.

Fears stalk us through our lives. Our first fear is separation, and the dark; then getting lost and being left out. Think of what we fear today. A transition in life—the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, the loss of employment. The loss of memory or capacity, not being included in a friend group, leaving home, or the prospect of being alone. The presence of fear in our lives is real. It is hard to entrust ourselves, and those we love, to the good shepherd.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.luc.edu/campusministry/about/meetourteam/srjeandolores-schmidtvm/>

<sup>4</sup> Adapted: <http://www.postpresby.org/Audio%20Sermon%20Files/2008/Shepherd's%20presence.pdf>

As a culture and a country, we experience fear: fear of loss of status in the world, the end of upward mobility; fear of the stranger or of anyone who is different. Our collective fears drive our decisions, they influence elections, and they weigh on us. They rob us of abundant life.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus speaks to our fears: “I am the good shepherd” (10:11).

To our fear of bullies, and our longing to do what’s right: “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11).

To our desire to belong: “I know my own and my own know me” (10:14).

Jesus speaks to our fear of strangers: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (10:16).

There is a connection between the promises of the good shepherd and our ongoing celebration of Easter. Easter isn’t a one-time holiday. It is a season, and even more than that, it is a way of life. Easter life is guided by the promise that something more is going on.

In today’s scripture reading Jesus is saying, “I am bigger than you know. I’m everywhere. At times, I may be unrecognizable to you. Don’t worry about that. I operate in all places.”

Easter proclaims that Jesus returns to us and will never let us go. The good shepherd accompanies the flock, morning and night. In that flock, fear loses its grip. We taste abundant life and find ways to use our lives and our words to care for others.

The parents and their daughter are part of the flock. So is Sister Jean. The spotlight’s off now, but that doesn’t stop her from doing what she always does, as a sheep in God’s flock.

We are part of that same flock. One flock. Lots of sheep. And one good shepherd who knows our names. Who knows your name. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> ...*In the Meantime, Easter 4B Resurrection Abundance*, by David Lose