

# WORLD & NATION

## Lourdes

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laugh.

Of the millions of desperately sick pilgrims who have traveled to the French mountain town since Mary's appearance to 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous beginning Feb. 11, 1858, 65 healings have been qualified as miracles by the church.

Dr. Robert Stein of Walnut Creek, a member of the Lourdes medical society and a Knight of Malta himself, is collecting Katie's medical records. He said an individual can qualify as a candidate for the designation of miracle if he or she has remained in remission from illness for 10 years.

Noting the length of Katie's remission, the retired anesthesiologist said he believes there can be a connection between spiritual experience and a positive autoimmune response to sickness.

In an interview with *Catholic San Francisco*, the archdiocesan newspaper, Stein said the investigation will take about a year. If the young woman's case meets the committee's criteria, Katie could become not only the 66th miracle, but the first American to receive the designation.

Katie was first diagnosed with leukemia when she was 8 years old. It was treated but reoccurred when she was in the seventh grade at Our Lady of the Angels School in Burlingame, said Charlotte. The Lourdes trip was a desperate act of faith on the part of the Kiesel to save their youngest child's life.

Following their daughter's return to health, the couple became a Knight and Dame of Malta. George Kiesel served as



CNS  
Katie Kiesel is shown in 1987 at the age of 13 with nurse Bunny Lewis at Lourdes, France. The girl was suffering from acute lymphatic leukemia at the time.

chair of the Lourdes pilgrimage in 1995, 1996 and 1997.

To this day, Katie doesn't know why her leukemia went into remission. "Maybe I'm supposed to do something. I believe there is a plan for every one of us," she said.

She doesn't know yet how that might eventually play out in her life. But talking and teaching about the Blessed Mother

figure prominently in her life as a teacher, she said.

After graduating from San Jose's Santa Clara University, Katie taught English and religion last year at Visitation Academy in Washington, D.C.

This summer she is teaching language arts at Mercy High School in Burlingame. She said she might stay on the West Coast this fall to pursue grad-

uate studies in theology.

She sees herself as a "mentor for kids." They are, she said, fascinated by the Lourdes story, which she doesn't hesitate to share. "They need to know that miracles do happen in the modern world," she added.

It is important that youths learn not to take life for granted, she believes. "After I got sick, I learned to appreciate the little things that came with each day. It made me grow up fast."

During her first trip to Lourdes, although she was running a fever and sleeping through many of the events, Katie says she was moved by large groups of people "praying for the same thing."

After 13 trips, she is still deeply moved. "I still can't explain it. All I know is, the experience gets better each year," she said.

"The first experience was like a closed rose," she added softly. "Over the years, everything begins to sink in, and then it blossoms."

Lourdes' first official miracle took place during the winter of 1858 when a woman, nine months pregnant, dipped her paralyzed arm into a spring which had unexplainably broken through the earth. Immediately, warmth shot through her arm. As she lifted it up from the water, her fingers straightened for the first time in her life. The paralysis was completely gone.

In addition to the 65 authenticated miracles since 1858, there have been some 5,000 unexplained healings.

In addition, pilgrims report millions of moral and spiritual healings they experience each year at the shrine, reports the Lourdes Web site at [www.sudfr.com/lourdes/](http://www.sudfr.com/lourdes/).



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