

= Charlene Richard =

Charlene Marie Richard (13 January 1947 ? 11 August 1959) was a twelve @-@ year @-@ old Roman Catholic Cajun girl residing in Richard , Louisiana , (30 ° 25 ? 18 ? N 92 ° 18 ? 46 ? W) in the United States at the time of her death . Richard has become the focus of a popular belief that she is a saint ? a person who is in heaven ? who has performed a number of miracles . The Roman Catholic Church has not given any official approval or begun any processes leading towards her canonization , but local Catholic clergy and diocesan officials have permitted , promoted , and participated in the popular veneration of Richard .

= = Life and final illness = =

Richard was the second @-@ oldest of ten children born to Joseph Elvin and Mary Alice Richard . Adults and children who knew her considered her to be smart but otherwise unremarkable . She was a devout Catholic but no more so than was customary in the local Cajun community . Richard 's mother said , " She liked sports and was always busy with something . She went to church and said her rosary , but she was just a normal little girl . " In May 1959 , after reading a book about Therese of Lisieux Richard asked her grandmother whether she , too , could become a saint by praying like Therese .

After reporting appearances of a tall woman in black who vanishes , and her teacher recommending that she was not herself , her mother took her to a physician . As a result , only two weeks before her death she was diagnosed with acute lymphatic leukemia and hospitalized at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette , Louisiana . At the request of her family , she was informed by the hospital chaplain , Joseph Brennan , a newly ordained Catholic priest , that she was going to die . Though the illness was painful , she remained cheerful , meekly accepted her fate , and offered up her suffering to God . Brennan was deeply impressed by her faith and visited her daily . While dying , Richard prayed for other individuals to be healed or to be converted to Catholicism . The Director of Pediatrics at the hospital , Theresita Crowley , a nun , also witnessed her calm acceptance of suffering and prayers for others . Brennan and Crowley claimed that those for whom Richard prayed recovered from their illnesses or became Catholic . Richard died on 11 August 1959 .

= = Belief in Richard as saint = =

Before her death Brennan and Crowley began telling people about Richard and Richard 's family became aware that there was a belief that she was " special . " Floyd Calais , a Catholic priest who was at the time the chaplain of Charity Hospital in Lafayette , was a close friend of Brennan . In 1961 , Calais began praying to Richard to be assigned to a parish . He was assigned to St. Edwards parish in Richard , Louisiana ? Richard 's burial place ? that same year . Once there , he discovered the need to raise money to build a new church there . Calais says that he was " invited to retreats and recollections , and began speaking about Charlene , how she achieved grace before she died " and about the need for money to build a new church in the parish . " People started going to her grave , " he said , " and began sending checks to build the church . What I thought would take 8 ? 10 years took 2 1 / 2 . "

As early as the late 1960s and by 1972 at the latest , prayer cards marked " For Private Devotion only " with a photograph of Richard , a prayer to her , and a prayer for her canonization were in circulation and xerographic copies were frequently being sent to individuals in need of help . A 1975 series of articles about Richard in the newspaper of the Lafayette diocese spread the cult and were republished in a booklet , " Charlene , A Saint from Southwest Louisiana " , in 1979 . Testimonials by individuals who believed that they had benefited by prayer to Richard were added and the booklet was again republished in 1988 . A widespread belief formed in the area that Richard would intercede in heaven for people 's prayers to be answered .

By 1989 , the belief had spread outside the Cajun area . Hundreds of people were visiting Richard 's grave each week , which had been illuminated so visits could occur in the evening and a box had

been provided in which to leave written petitions to Richard . On the thirtieth anniversary of her death that year , an outdoor mass was held there which was attended by four thousand people and which was covered by Louisiana television stations and the Cable News Network , and was reported in newspapers in Louisiana , Dallas , Houston , Miami , Orlando , Albany , and Seattle . The media coverage resulted in knowledge of Richard spreading world @-@ wide , with interest in her expressed in Yugoslavia , Croatia , Australia , and Africa . Approximately a thousand people attended anniversary masses there in both 1991 and 1999 , with about 400 attending in 2007 , and thousands come to her grave each year , including chartered buses from New Orleans .

= = Church position = =

No official canonization procedures have begun for Richard , though the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lafayette began collecting testimonials about reputed help obtained through her in 1991 . Unlike the traditional support for canonization of a saint , which begins with popular devotion and is only later recognized by the Church , support for Richard began outside her immediate home area and was first promoted by the clergy , beginning with Brennan , Crowley , and Calais . The bishop of the Lafayette diocese at the time of her death , Maurice Schexnayder , visited her grave multiple times and referred to her as a saint . Another bishop of the diocese , Harry Flynn , presided at the thirtieth anniversary mass in 1989 , along with sixteen other priests . The diocese also approved the creation of a private organization , the Friends of Charlene , to spread her story .