



Tsi Nahò:ten Karihwanákere Nó:nen'k

PRESS RELEASE

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Council of Chiefs to engage community regarding issue of Fr. Leon Lajoie's remains

For Immediate Release

(Kahnawake – 20, Seskéha/August 2021) The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke wishes to inform Kahnawa'kehró:non about an important matter developing in the community concerning the remains of Fr. Leon Lajoie, a priest belonging to the Jesuit Order, who served in Kahnawà:ke for 39 years and was buried in the Territory upon his death in May 1999. The former pastor is interred at the Saint Francis-Xavier Mission.

The issue stems from actions initiated by a group of community members who have formed a position that the remains must be removed from the Territory. The Ratitsénhahienhs (Council of Chiefs) learned of this matter in early July and, given its serious nature, immediately undertook actions to research all facts concerning the situation, and to open communications with key stakeholders in our community.

The Ratitsénhahienhs have initiated open communications with the People who gather at the Church on Sunday mornings, the People who gather at Tekakwitha Island on Sunday evenings, the Church Committee of Saint Francis-Xavier Mission, and the Jesuits of Canada.

The clear objective of the Ratitsénhahienhs is to support and facilitate resolve to this matter by ensuring that all factors are taken into consideration.

In a recent meeting between representatives from the Ratitsénhahienhs and the Jesuits of Canada, *it was identified by the representatives of the Jesuits of Canada that a relocation of remains requires the express direction of the Council of Chiefs.*

The Ratitsénhahienhs deliberated on this matter during a duly convened meeting held on August 16th. Given that the issue of relocation of remains is a matter that is unprecedented in our community, that the issue brings forth strong concerns, and that the nature of this issue touches many people in a deeply personal and emotional way, the Ratitsénhahienhs have taken a position that prior to being able to take a decision on the relocation of the remains, it must first consult with all sectors of the community. The Ratitsénhahienhs must engage Kahnawa'kehró:non in conversation, as the feedback will be very important in guiding an informed decision by the Ratitsénhahienhs on this issue.

As such, we will be engaging the community on this matter over the coming weeks. We recognize that positions on this issue can come with very strong opinions, and are committed to ensuring that we are thorough, while being expedient, in holding discussions with the community.

The Ratitsénhahienhs will be releasing information in the coming days on engagement activities. We ask that community members inform themselves on this matter and consider engaging in conversation on this important matter.