

# Kateri's remains to stay where they are

## *Toronto group's request turned down*

By: Dan Rosenburg

When World Youth Day is celebrated in Toronto next July, it will have to be done without the remains of Kateri Tekakwitha being present.

Last fall a delegation of Catholic priests and a cardinal from the Toronto area came to Kahnawake on what they portrayed as a noble mission following consultation with a Native community from Ontario.

The out-of-town callers were led by Cardinal Stafford, Father Frocoli and Luigi Ventura, the Pope's ambassador in Ottawa.

"They told us they wanted to borrow relics for the Youth Day occasion, but as they talked it became clear that what they really wanted was Kateri's remains that are entombed in this church," recalled Father Louis Cyr of St. Francis Xavier Mission in conversation with *The Eastern Door* last Friday.

The visitors had been hoping to have Kateri's remains on display at Ste. Anne's Church, a Native parish in Toronto. But they have since been politely informed that this won't happen.

"We told them this was just not do-able," Father Cyr explained. "We said that if they wanted small relics, they knew where they could get them: at the Diocese of Chicoutimi. But there was never any question that we would lift up the tombstone and unlock the chest to uncover what is left of her remains."

Father Cyr says that the delegation was equating Kateri with Ste. Therese, a saint who died in France and whose remains were locked away "in a beautiful gilded chest. The French allowed the chest to be sent on a pilgrimage to other countries, and the group from Ontario obviously had something similar in mind to foster devotion to Kateri.

"But doing such a thing with Kateri's remains is just unthinkable," Father Cyr continued. "They apparently thought that by saying they

consulted with a Native community in Toronto it might influence us, but this turned out not to be a fact.

"There's no question of tampering with Kateri's remains," he repeated. "It is not a possibility by any normal reasoning. It seems they were mesmerized by linking Kateri to Ste. Therese. But I informed them that this is not the Native way of doing things. Outside people might do it, but it's not part of the

Native culture."

Father Cyr said that then-Kahnawake Grand Chief Andrew Delisle expressed it best during the early 1980s campaign to have Kateri beatified. "He said it is not in the Mohawk custom to put people on a pedestal. But he noted that Kahnawake is very proud of her deep down, and that says it all."

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