

Présence – Information religieuse

No abuse blamed on the Jesuit Léon Lajoie

Father Léon Lajoie, head of the Mission Saint-François-Xavier in Kahnawake from 1956 to 1990, allegedly committed no sexual offense against children, says the firm that investigated the allegations against this Jesuit during the summer and fall of 2021, the day after the discovery of anonymous burials at the former boarding school in Kamloops, British Columbia.

In the report of its investigation, which has just been made public by the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, the King International Advisory Group indicates that only three alleged victims could be identified and that two of them agreed to meet with investigators.

In the fall of 2021, media reported that some 20 members of the Kahnawake community may have been abused, during their childhood, by Jesuit Lajoie. Troubled by these revelations and the number of people who said they had been assaulted by their colleague, who had died for more than two decades, the Jesuits of Canada mandated an external firm to determine whether these allegations were well founded.

“To date, none of the other seventeen alleged victims [mentioned by the media] have come forward,” the survey summary reads. In addition, no one in the Mohawk community could identify them, to the point where investigators have wondered “if they really exist.”

One of those met was 6 years old at the time of the alleged events. Having been “subject to extreme emotional and physical abuse throughout his life,” investigators consider it conceivable that the childhood memories of this alleged victim “have been subject to varying degrees of confabulation.” They argue, without being able to publicly share their reasons, that his “allegations are unfounded.” The third complainant stated that he was sexually assaulted at the Mission Saint-Francois-Xavier in the 1970's. The investigative firm believes that a serious assault has indeed been committed but, “for reasons discovered during our investigation and on a balance of probabilities,” it refutes the idea that Father Léon Lajoie is the author. Since this mission was under the responsibility of the Jesuits at the time, the report recommends that the Jesuits of Canada and the community of Kahnawake “support this person.”

“The conclusions to date, subject to any additional information and as presented in our detailed report, currently do not support any allegations of sexual abuse committed by Jesuit Léon Lajoie in Kahnawake during the period 1956-1990,” the investigation report concludes.

At the time of publication, the leaders of the Mission Saint-François-Xavier, the Diocese of Saint-Jean-Longueuil and the Jesuits of Canada had not yet commented on the findings of the investigation report, submitted to the religious congregation on February 28 but made public today by the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake.

Alleged victims of Father Lajoie also had a petition signed in the fall of 2021 to have the remains of the Jesuit, buried near the church where he worked for more than thirty-five years, to be exhumed and buried outside the territory of the Mohawk community. It was the then-Aboriginal leaders who authorized, the day after his funeral and at the request of his family, that his body be buried in Kahnawake and not in St. Jérôme, where members of the congregation usually rest.

The current leaders of Kahnawake ruled that on March 25 and 26, 2022, all members of the community would be called to vote in order to decide whether the remains of Father Lajoie can remain in the territory or whether they should be exhumed. If the latter option is preferred by the Mohawks, the Jesuits of Canada have already indicated that they will bear all the costs of transferring the remains.

-François Gloutnay (translation from the original French article)