

Great Law is message of peace

OHSWEKEN — It seems fitting that the Hodenosaunee begin the 500th year of the Columbus voyage from Europe by reciting the Kai: ianereserakowa or Great Law.

During the period since 1492 the English language has become the language of diplomacy. With that in mind, this recital of the Great Law will be shared in English because its message of peace is for all human beings who live on Mother Earth.

Loosely translated from Mohawk, Kai: ianereserakowa really means "the great, very goodness." In English jargon, Divine Ethics would be close, since the Great Law is really a code of divine ethics.

English law is based on property but the Great Law is based on people; how you are and how you behave. It is a people-law delineating relationships with earthlings and living spirits. It was given to the people by the Creator which makes it Divine. It does not impose a religion nor does it restrict religious freedom.

When Iroquois student Benjamin Franklin counselled Thomas Jefferson on Onkwehonwe ideology, the concept of checks and balances between legislative, judicial and executive branches of government were quickly adopted by America's founding fathers. The Iroquois use of the people's opinion in governance and practise of natural rights were welcomed by

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Europeans desiring freedom from the tyranny of monarchical heritages.

Wrote Franklin: "All their government is by counsel of the sages; there is no force, no prison, no officers to compel obedience, or inflict punishment."

The format for the five-day talk, which ends on Sunday, includes a Thanksgiving address followed by each daily topic. Afternoon sessions include discussion and answer periods and evening socials are also planned. Topics include the historical narrative of the Peacemakers presence among the Onkwehonwe, the healing of the five war-torn nations, the founding of the confederation and the Constitution. A peace covenant between the chiefs, the role and duties of clan mothers, national officials, the Big Names, Pine Trees, Runners and deputies will also be recited.

On the fifth day the presentation concludes by a focus on rights and freedoms of the people, kinship regulations, roles of

womankind, mankind, faith keepers and the relationship of the people to the Circle Wampum and the Ai:ionwatha belt.

A speakers panel and committee consists of: Jacob Thomas, office of Teiohonweton, Sandpiper Clan, Cayuga Nation; Richard Maracle, office of Rastewenserontha, Bear Clan, Mohawk Nation; Robert Jamieson, office of Translator, Six Nations Confederacy Council of Chiefs. Andrew Fuller is workshop moderator and Ozzie Staats is co-ordinator of activities for this event.

The Great Law workshop was initiated by a request from Iroquoian band councils at a summit meeting with Confederacy Chiefs in April, 1991, at Gibson Reserve. Sponsored jointly by Six Nations, Tyendinaga and Gibson, inquiries have come from British Columbia, Saskatchewan and the U.S.

Metal folding chairs will be provided at Ohsweken Hall but visitors can bring their own. Although cameras and tape recorders are not allowed, visitors wishing to take notes can do so.