

Descendents group want participation in mission reburial



Kin Man Hui, San Antonio Express-News

Diane Flores beats a Native American drum as she joins members and supporters of the Texas Indigenous Council in a protest in front of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio on Thursday, Jan. 24, 2013. One of the issues of the protest centers on 15 remains which were unearthed at Mission San Jose this past year. According to council spokesperson Antonio Diaz, the group wanted to be included in a study of the remains but has been met with exclusion instead from the Archdiocese.

Next month, Catholic parishioners will rebury the remains of 15 indigenous people excavated last year at Mission San Juan during an extensive restoration now nearing completion.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio works exclusively with the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation on such

matters, descendents of an American Indian community that lived at the five Spanish missions, a history officially recognized by the state.

On Thursday, Antonio Diaz and seven others protested in front of the San Antonio archdiocese headquarters, calling for Catholic leaders to broaden participation so other American Indians also can take part in honoring their ancestors and discovering their heritage.

“We have no problem with (Tap Pilam) but it's not their responsibility to share the information with us,” said Diaz, head of the Texas Indigenous Council, which claims 20 members.



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In 1999, former San Antonio Archbishop Patrick Flores designated Tap Pilam as the only group the archdiocese would work with on the sensitive issue of indigenous reburials.

At the time, many groups self-identified as descended from the “mission Indians” of the colonial era. Sorting out their ancestral claims was difficult.

Since the state had validated Tap Pilam, it added credibility, said Father David Garcia, director of the Old Spanish Missions, an archdiocesan agency overseeing preservation work.

“We think we're respectful of the indigenous and the Catholic rituals of burying the remains of people who died,” he said.

Tap Pilam does a ritual each November to honor more than 100 indigenous reburied in 1999 at Mission San Juan in an effort to mend their controversial removal three decades before.



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Raymond Hernandez, on the Tap Pilam tribal council, said other indigenous groups will get an invitation to the reburial service.

“People see our accomplishments but don't realize the years invested to get to where we are,” he said. “I understand the frustration some of these groups feel, but we were put through a process to get this acknowledgement.”

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