

'We are all of water'

Meet Josephine Mandamin, Water Walker

By Carolyn Pogue

I was anxious to meet the Elder known as the Water Walker at the [Sacred Water Circle](#) in Peterborough, Ont. And Grandmother Josephine Mandamin did not disappoint. She is gentle and passionate, soft-spoken and strong. She was among the First Nation Elders from the Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Peru, Columbia, Arizona and South Dakota invited by Curve Lake First Nation for a three-day conference recently. It was supported by Trent University, Fleming College, Faith and the Common Good/[Greening Sacred Spaces](#) and Green Up Peterborough, among other groups.

Josephine is from Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island, Ont. Alarmed by changes to water quality in Lake Huron, she initiated The Mother Earth Water Walks in 2003. She began by leading walks around the perimeter of all five Great Lakes. She next walked the length of the St. Lawrence River. These days, she could be anywhere, walking, teaching, performing ceremonies to love, bless and thank water. She reminds us that the planet is more water than solid matter — just as we are.

All told, it took Josephine 36 days to traverse the 2,000 km-perimeter of Lake Superior. She walked more than 12 to 15 hours every day. Such is her determination to speak for the waters of Turtle Island. So far, she has walked nearly 20,000 km for water.



Josephine Mandamin. Photo by Carolyn Pogue

As she continues to walk for water, she continues to dream of other ways to heal Mother Earth. She asks for a worldwide four-day fast to give the planet time to catch her breath. At the Sacred Water Circle, Josephine asked that I relay her statement as far as possible. So I invite you, through Facebook, email, snail mail, storytelling — or whatever means you have — to tell others about her World Fast for Mother Earth between June 20 and June 23. Consider participating, yourselves, also. After all, we must do something to support her healing.

Mother Earth is not merely a sweet way to name the planet, it describes Josephine's and others' real relationship with her. "We have a duty," she says. "The world has a duty to protect our Mother Earth and her life blood — our life blood — the water."

During noon hour on June 23, our church sanctuary in Calgary will be open. We will show a [YouTube video](#) of Josephine. In a sharing circle, we will speak of our connection with water and participate in prayer.

Some years ago, I wrote a poem about Mother Earth's gifts on the banks of the Mississippi River.

Here's an excerpt:

*Make prayers for the life of the rivers
Make prayers for the creeks and the streams
make prayers to the Holy Myst'ry
Make prayers for Earth Mother's dreams.*

*Fall down on your knees by the water
Fall down on the muck, sand or slate
Fall down in humility, hope and love
And pray that it's not too late.*



Carolyn Pogue is a longtime Observer contributor. New posts of The Pogue Blog will appear on the first and third Thursday of the month. For more information on Carolyn Pogue, visit www.carolynpogue.ca.