

# Transforming Relations: A Collaborative Collection

A snapshot of initiatives which create space for the transformation of settler consciousness

## Case Study: The Sacred Water Circle

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by Cherylanne James

In 2011, Dorothy Taylor from Curve Lake First Nation in Ontario took up a call from [Indigenous spiritual leaders](#) around the world. The Hopi, the Dalai Lama and the spiritual authorities of Gonawindua (Sierra Madres de Santa Marta, Colombia) had called out to the world to protect the water and to bring awareness to the beauty and living giving force of water. In recent years, the government of Canada has implemented detrimental policies that looked to further develop and extract resources from the land, at the cost of polluting Mother Earth and life giving water. Dorothy took up this call, and with a group of interfaith people from various cultural backgrounds, they formed the [Sacred Water Circle](#).

The “Sacred Water Circle seeks to create dialogue around spiritually-based environmental issues, and to motivate communities and governments to act to set policy that will protect our water, by leading with prayer and walking together” (website, 2014).

Water is very sacred to Indigenous people, and to all people. For Anishinaabe people, more specifically kwe (women), it is their responsibility to care for the water. As Anishinaabe kwe, they are the carriers of the water. They carry this water in their wombs and bring forth life into the world. It is with this knowledge that Anishinaabe kwe have a special relationship with water.

Coming together to create a space that is Anishinaabe-led is done through a decolonization lens. It is done through unpacking how previous organizations have been run, and how they have been led by non-Indigenous people. This organization is done in unison with the group of culturally diverse people; however, they follow the lead of Anishinaabe leaders. A respectful

approach to being a part of an interfaith group is to ensure that every faith is respected. A strong approach used in the Sacred Water Circle is public education, which seeks to get the word out there to spread awareness of the importance of water and of the relationship that we all have with water. The Sacred Water Circle's goal is seeking to connect to future generations and to see a future that is will continue to fight for water. The 2013 Sacred Water Conference focused on youth and how to involve youth and to hear their voices. Youth came from all over to share their ideas and to interact with Elders to learn about water and to see a future where there is change.

“My grandmother told me of a time when water would be like gold, like many others heard in their young lives. Slowly these Prophecies came into our lives, we didn't pay attention in our young days—because our backyards were not affected, back then it was the mining and farmers spraying chemicals....People are scrambling to find good water that is nowhere to be found in their communities. Our way of life through prayer is to prevent such hurtful disasters on behalf of our future generations; it is our responsibility. I ask all the Voices to stand together at this time in Unity. My prayers continue for all you bringing attention to these global Giants affecting us all as a whole and for the Global Giants to pay attention to their own children's future. In a Sacred Hoop of Life, where there is no ending and no beginning!” ~ Chief Arvol Looking Horse (website, 2014).

It is the goal of the Sacred Water Circle to bring people together to create a relationship with water for all human beings. In response to the creation of this relationship, they hold an annual Sacred Water Circle Conference in May. These conferences seek to bring together people from all walks of life and various ways of knowing to discuss water, to bring hope to youth that change is possible, and to bring together a variety of voices from First Nations people to scientists. The conferences are three day events with a variety of workshops and ceremonies to develop solutions to help the water. The goals for the 2014 Sacred Water Conference are;

- To bring together the Indigenous leaders who inspired the SWC initiative to the Kawarthas in order to host a significant world event on sacred water.
- To bring local and international leaders and speakers to the SWC gathering to share traditional teachings with the youth participants, government leaders, water quality scientists, industrial leaders, and community leaders.
- To catalyze positive action plans for community involvement in decisions making that affect the health of water.

- To participate in ongoing collaborations with other local groups who have a focus similar to the SWC.
- To share and promote inspirational and educational tools as a product of this significant event experience and share with other communities.

Guests that will be present at the 2014 Conference are Josephine Mandamin from Wikemikong, Manitoulin Island, ON, Charlie Neyelle and Morris Neyelle from Sahtu Dene, Deline First Nation, NT, The Hopi People from Shungopavi Village, AZ, USA, Chief Arvol Looking Horse from Sioux Nation, Cheyenne River, South Dakota, USA, People of the Earth – the Kogi from La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia and Jhaimy Alvarez-Acosta an Andean Wisdomkeeper.

“Water is life itself and makes all life possible, and we continue to honour the sacredness of water in our ceremonies. Sadly, today we are at a crossroads, and unless we actively work to defend and protect the water, water will become as valuable as gold to future generations” ~ Chief Arvol Looking Horse (website, 2014).

Each year the Sacred Water Conference is run around the same time as the Water Walk. The Water Walkers are a separate organization of diverse people led by Anishinaabe-kwewag who walk to raise awareness of water. In previous years, from 2010 until present they have walked around Rice Lake, Stoney Lake, Upper Chemong Lake and Rice Lake again. In 2014, they are walking around the territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. Every year the water walk occurs on Mother’s Day weekend, which is a symbolic date for the Water Walks, “we pay homage to our mothers and grandmothers, we also remember and honour our Earth Mother and her life-giving water that nourishes and sustains all Creation.”

“A copper pail is filled with water and carried around a lake by Anishinaabe-kwewag (women) who bless and sing to the water. The Water Walks braid ceremony, spirit and community to bring people together to teach us about the sacredness of water. With this awareness, we can become informed caretakers of our waters.” Words from the Water Walkers about who the Water Walkers are (website, 2014).

To date the Sacred Water Circle has gained support from around the Peterborough area in raising awareness for the waters around Peterborough. Supporters of the Sacred Water Circle are: The Ontario Trillium Foundation, Peterborough Community Future Development Corporation, School of Environment and Natural Resource Sciences, Trent University, GreenUp,

TRACKS, Greening Sacred Spaces, The Council of Canadians, KWIC, City of Peterborough, Curve Lake First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre, The Baagwating Community Association, First Peoples House of Learning, and The Kawartha Lakes Water Awareness Walk. All the supporters have given a variety of support through different methods. Last year they were given monetary support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which made the 2014 Sacred Water Conference an international event.

To examine the initiative that this group of interfaith people took on, one must examine their own place within an organization, and to understand their role as a person who lives on Indigenous lands. There are many voices that come together to create awareness for the water. Creation of a safe space to talk and share ideas is vitally important. Becoming unsettled through working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is a shifting of consciousness and must be done with a great deal of respect for others and self-care.

“The water carries the same energy as mother’s milk and represents to us the milk that is given to us by the Cosmic Mother through Mother Earth for our lives. Therefore, we also call her YakuMama (Mother Water) because we not only receive life from her but also the energy and the programming of the water that goes into ourselves. Our traditional ceremonies with the water give us a way to plant new seeds, new ideas and to bring clarity and peace to all of humanity” ~ Jhaimy Alvarez-Acosta (website, 2014).

For more information regarding the Sacred Water Circle and The Kawartha Lakes Water Awareness Walk please visit the website: [www.sacredwater.ca](http://www.sacredwater.ca)



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