

# what is a labyrinth?

A labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The Labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the center of your deepest self and back out into the world with a broadened understanding of who you are.

The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool, a walking meditation, a path of prayer. Walking the labyrinth can reduce stress, quiet the mind, open the heart, and bring one closer to God. People walk the labyrinth to heal, to be enriched in the spiritual life, seeking peace, seeking insight. The labyrinth can be a transformational tool, opening us to change in our spirit, in our minds, seeking insight.

Labyrinths have been known to the human race for over 4,000 years. The oldest form on record is the Cretan labyrinth, also called the classical seven-circuit labyrinth. Labyrinths are made of many materials. Some of paths are outlined in stone, others are carved into stone. Early Roman-style labyrinths usually were made of mosaic tile. Turf labyrinths, found throughout England, Scandinavia, and Germany, are made from mounds of earth covered with grass.

The most famous labyrinth remaining from the Middle Ages is at Chartres Cathedral located near Paris. Built around 1200 A.D., the Chartres labyrinth was meant to be walked as a pilgrimage or for repentance. As a pilgrimage it was a quest to become closer to God and would serve as a substitute for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The labyrinth at the Church of the Holy Spirit is modeled after the Chartres labyrinth. It is painted on the Church's patio and is available for use, weather permitting, at any time.

In the English language the words "labyrinth" and "maze" are incorrectly used interchangeably. A maze has twists, turns, and dead ends. A labyrinth has only one path. The way in is the way out. There are no dead ends. The path leads you on a circuitous path to the center and out again.

## why do people walk labyrinths?

- \* to relax and feel at peace
- \* to let go of their worries and concerns
- \* to cope with grief and loss
- \* for insight on special problems
- \* for healing of relationships
- \* to open the flow of creativity for vocational discernment
- \* for forgiveness
- \* to express thanksgiving to God for the birth of a new child, recovery from illness, a new beginning, friends or the beauty of the earth
- \* before an operation, marriage, ordination, dealing with a difficult situation or at the time of the death of a close friend

## basic approaches to walking the labyrinth

There are as many ways to walk it as there are walkers, but here are some suggestions.

*Be in the Moment:* quiet your mind, let go of doing and be, allow thoughts to go away and be still in mind.

*Ask a Question:* Prior to walking, journal your thoughts or share what you are looking for with another person (they might help you to form your unspoken question). During the walk look at your question from all aspects; walking allows your own consciousness to open so deeper aspects of yourself can speak.

*Use Repetition:* a mantra phrase, centering prayer, non-distracting word, affirmation sentence.

*Read & Reflect On Scripture:* a psalm or other inspiring material.

*Ask for Help Through Prayer:* pray as you walk.

*Honor a Benchmark in Your Life or That of Another:* a memorial act, a celebratory act, a penitence act, an intercessory act, etc.

*Make a Body Prayer:* move spontaneously as encouraged by the path, feel safe in its containment, sense kinetic awareness.

*Use Accessories:* wear a colored scarf as symbolic of something for you; carry an object of significance to you (votive candle, flower, stone, etc.) Whatever you carry in should be carried out as well.

## stages of the walk

### Purgation (Releasing):

As you walk into the labyrinth, let go of the details of your life, shedding distractions.

### Illumination (Receiving):

As you reach the center, open your heart and mind to receive what is there for you to receive, stay as long as seems right for you.

### Union (Returning):

As you leave the center, following the same path out, there may be a strange sense of strengthening and clarity. You become more empowered to find and do the work you feel your soul reaching to do.

You only have to enter and follow the path. However, your walk can encompass a variety of attitudes. It may be joyous or somber. It might be thoughtful or prayerful. You may use it as a walking meditation.

When you walk a labyrinth choose your attitude. From time to time choose a different attitude. Make it serious, prayerful, or playful. Play music or sing. Pray out loud. Walk alone and with a crowd. Notice the sky. Listen to the sounds. Most of all pay attention to your experience.

## guidelines

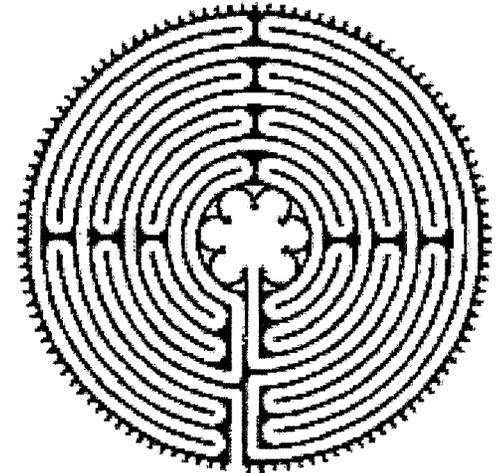
- ❖ Maintain silence for your reflection and that of others
- ❖ Take some time before you walk to clear your mind and become aware of your breathing.
- ❖ Allow your body to find it's own pace. The path is two ways; those going in will meet those coming out. You may "pass" people or let them step around you, this is easiest at turns.
- ❖ Be aware of your process and feelings and know that you are sharing this with others. Remember, all things on your walk will instruct. Your walk is uniquely yours.
- ❖ Do what feels natural. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to walk the labyrinth.
- ❖ Take time after your walk to reflect and meditate. Repeat.



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# walking the Labyrinth



at the  
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