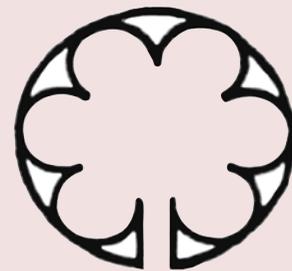


## HISTORY OF THE LABYRINTH

The labyrinth has been featured in cultures worldwide as a pattern of initiation and transformation. It has been known to the human race for over 4,000 years, conjuring up such images as the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur. It has been used in many different religious ways by many peoples, such as solar or lunar calendars. In Arizona and the American Southwest the Hopi use a form of the labyrinth in their religious symbolism. For example, the Tohono O'odham "Man in the Maze" is actually a "seven-circuit" labyrinth and is part of an elaborate creation myth. The labyrinth's current popularity in the U.S. started in the early 1990s but has exploded in the last two years, with churches, hospitals, even schools and prisons building them.

The oldest existing Christian labyrinth is probably the one in the fourth-century basilica of Reparatus, Orleansville, Algeria. And while Christians used labyrinths on pre-Christian sites and modeled their own after ones used by earlier cultures, the development of the high medieval Christian seven-circuit labyrinth was a breakthrough in design. Its path of seven circles was cruciform (shaped like the Cross) and thus incorporated the central Christian symbol. Use of these labyrinths flourished in Europe throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries and beyond, especially in the French cathedrals of Chartres, Sens,

Poitiers, Bayeaux, Amiens and Rheims and in the Italian cathedrals at Lucca and San Maria-di-Trastavera in Rome. Medieval pilgrims, unable to fulfill their desire to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, went instead to many pilgrimage sites in Europe or Britain. In many cases the end of their journey was a labyrinth formed of stone and laid in the floor of the nave of one of these great Gothic cathedrals. The center of the labyrinths probably represented for pilgrims the Holy City itself and thus became the substitute goal of the journey. We know from the Chartres Cathedral that the labyrinth was used at the Easter rites when the dean of the cathedral would dance into the center together with the congregation in a symbolic act of Christ's death and resurrection.



## WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?

The labyrinth offers us a way of journeying, inviting us into a sacred quiet place. It is a place where we can experience profound silence. It is a place where we can abandon the busyness of life, to escape the fast lane, to take a daily mini-vacation. It is a place that offers us the opportunity to be present to the Holy One and to our inner selves. To walk the labyrinth is to make a pilgrimage to discover something about ourselves and God. The labyrinth is not magic, but it is full of mystery. It produces different results for everyone – or perhaps none at all. To walk the labyrinth is to take a precious "time out" – to be refreshed. There is no dogma associated with the labyrinth. A person simply brings his or her personal thoughts, spiritual needs – maybe a specific problem, or an important life decision to be made.

There are some issues related to our human condition and to our destiny that require contemplation. Humans need to set aside their usual tasks and take the time to seriously reflect on these issues. Such contemplation has at least two prerequisites: it takes time, and it requires some modicum of silence. The labyrinth is a perfect vehicle to satisfy both prerequisites. Moments of silent contemplation allow the profound truths of life to sink in.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR WALKING THE LABYRINTH

The labyrinth is a path for prayer and meditation. Collect yourself before you start. Sit and rest at one of the benches for a while. Take off your shoes if weather permits. Walking barefoot on sacred ground is a rewarding experience. Think of different people, events, situations, places or things in your life to develop a specific intention as you walk. Get centered.

There are many ways of walking: Two are The WAY OF SILENCE and the WAY OF IMAGE. In choosing the way of silence it might be helpful to focus on breathing. The way of image might be done by reciting a prayer or a name for God over and over to yourself. Ask yourself: How am I loved? How do I love? In either way or in some other manner best suited to you, be open to your heart and mind. Pay attention to your thoughts as they rise and then let them go.

The labyrinth is a place of presence; allow yourself to be present to yourself and to God. The labyrinth is a teacher; let it teach you through the mysterious power of God. As you walk the path, thoughts and ideas may rise up for you and in you – often in refreshing and startling ways.

The labyrinth is divided neatly into four quarters around a cross, standing in the medieval mind for the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and also for the four stages of the Liturgy, the Word, Offertory, Consecration, and Communion. Walking the labyrinth may also model the classical three-fold spiritual path:

*Purgation:*

Walking in, emptying, or letting go.

*Illumination:*

Time in the center, clarity, insight.

*Union:*

Walking out, initiative, integration, and action in the world.

The labyrinth is also a symbol of the individuation process. Walking into the center can help us deal with obstacles that hinder our growth. In the center we can dialogue with the Divine and receive insight, freedom, joy. Walking out, we become someone new and experience energy as co-creators for making God visible. Walking the labyrinth gives us the opportunity to rid ourselves of anger, it can soothe us, open our minds to imagination and creativity. It slows us down. It enables us to connect mind, body and spirit.

One way to feel more connected to the experience is, again, to walk barefoot and slowly. There is no need to rush. Some people feel a sense of confusion as they first start; remember there is only one path in and one path out. You will not get lost. For some people walking as quickly as possible to the center, resting there, and then walking quickly out is a powerful experience. You set your own pace and pattern for your journey.

Here are a few suggestions in ways of walking the labyrinth:

*Gracious Attention:*

Let all thoughts go. Allow a sense of attention to flow through you.

*Ask a Question:*

Focus on a question. Walk with a listening heart.

*Use Repetition:*

Repeat a word, mantra, or phrase over and over.

*Offer petitions:*

Bring to mind persons or issues for which you wish to pray.

*Honor a Benchmark:*

A birthday, a life-style change, an anniversary. A memorial can be the focus of your walk.

*Body Prayer:*

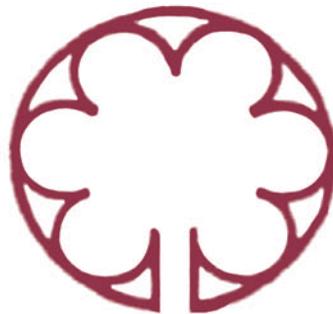
Move spontaneously as your body wishes. Dance the path. Move your arms and legs, bend and sway.

## EXPERIENCING THE LABYRINTH

People have different experiences walking the labyrinth. As with all practices of prayer or meditation, your experience will grow and deepen the more you do it. Usually we don't have time to reflect on the spiritual part of ourselves during our busy days, but when we slow down, all of a sudden we notice that there are other things in life to be concerned about. We even begin to notice the beauty of the world around us.

There is no "right" experience. Some people feel a sense of peace, or find old memories rising up as they walk. Others find themselves thinking about an immediate situation or person. One person shares that he walks it with his cancer, another with a deceased grandmother, another with an anxiety she is dealing with, another with the pain of going through a divorce. Some walk at varying speeds as different thoughts and emotions come and go. Some people experience physical sensations, perhaps become light-headed, or have a feeling of floating above, a feeling of weight, or of great warmth. Some walk the labyrinth with fear of the unexpected. Some people have profound insights. Others have very small experiences, or none at all.

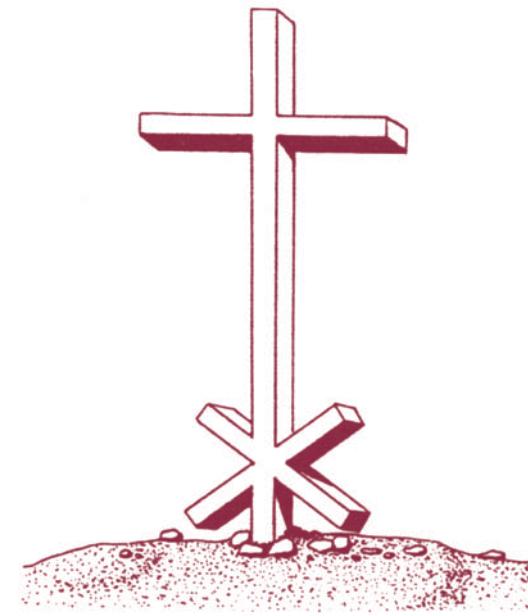
The experience of walking the labyrinth is different for each person, each time. Whatever you experience, it is your experience. Relax and see what happens.



## ST. ANDREW'S INVITATION

People of all faiths are welcome to walk the labyrinth at any time. Because our labyrinth is lighted for night use, one may walk the labyrinth until 10:30 p.m. each evening.

Please do not speak to people who are walking the labyrinth; it is their sacred time and space as they walk on sacred ground.



St. Andrew Catholic Community  
1399 San Felipe Dr  
Boulder City NV 89005-3202

# The Labyrinth



*Walking the Way of Wisdom  
A Path or Spiritual Growth  
A Tool for Inner Work*