

Walking a Sacred Path



WHY WALK THE LABYRINTH?

Many walk the labyrinth for grieving the loss of loved ones, facing personal struggles with illness, or coping with change. Others use this walking meditation to focus the mind, to manage stress, to induce a peaceful state in the midst of confusion, and to listen to the Spirit of God guiding our lives. The Labyrinth is a path of prayer, introspection, and healing.

HISTORY OF LABYRINTH.

The Labyrinth is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in most religious traditions in various forms around the world. Here we have a replica of the Chartres Labyrinth, laid in the floor of Chartres Cathedral, France, around 1220.

In the Christian tradition, the first labyrinths were found in Gothic cathedrals and were symbolic paths where the sacred pilgrimage to the Holy Land could be made closer to home. There are more than 100 public labyrinths in the United States. They can be found in churches, hospitals, parks, prisons, schools, and in many private settings.

HOW TO WALK THE LABYRINTH.

There is no wrong way to walk, crawl, run, sit, pause, pray or play in the labyrinth. The Labyrinth has only one path into the center and the return is through that same path. This walk is a symbol and metaphor for our daily walk in life or for the situations that challenge us. Dr. Lauren Artress in her book *Walking the Sacred Path*, states "The circular path inward cleanses and quiets us as it leads us in. The unwinding path integrates and empowers us on our walk back out. Walking out of the winding path, we are literally ushered back out into the world in a strengthened condition."

Information was adapted from writings by Dr. Lauren Artress of *Veriditas* and from workshop training notes.

GUIDELINES FOR WALKING THE LABYRINTH.

Clear your mind. You may find it helpful to become aware of the rhythm of your breathing. Make an intention for your walk such as a prayer to forgive or obtain a solution to a problem. As you walk, allow yourself to find the pace your body wants to go — some people walk slowly, some find themselves skipping. You may "pass" people or let others step around you. Be open to the gentle guiding of the spirit. You are in prayer. Take the space you need to hear God speak to you and give that space to others on the path. Take time in the center. You may choose to sit, stand, or kneel. On your way out, keep your own pace — there is no need to hurry. When you have finished, take a few minutes to reflect on your walk. You may want to write down some of your reflections or share your experience with others.

STAGES. The stages of the walk flow into three parts. The walk into the labyrinth is a time to let go of the details of life and clear the mind and releases that which is not necessary for healing. When you reach the center, this is a time to listen, accept and to receive guidance and peace. The walk out is a time to integrate what you have received and be nourished to return back out into the world. In classical spirituality these are the stages of purgation, illumination, and union.