

in union with the Divine. As you leave the labyrinth you will pick up the worldly concerns which you left at the entrance. However, this time you will be able to hold them with a different attitude.

Questions to guide you:

- ❖ What did I receive and how might I be changed because of it?
- ❖ What is it like for me to be in the presence of God?
- ❖ How does it feel to be accompanied by the Spirit?
- ❖ How can I best respond to God for that which I have been given?
- ❖ How shall I prepare to return to the world after this experience?

As you leave the labyrinth, you may wish to write down your experience. You may want to use words or drawings. a timeline of your spiritual journey.

Remember that there is no right way and no wrong way to experience the labyrinth. There are only three guidelines – follow the path, go at your own pace, respect others on the way. The experiences walkers have on the labyrinth are often considered a metaphor for your life journey and your spiritual journey. The labyrinth has been described as a body prayer, or an opportunity to be attentive to God's presence in a new way. Allow the rhythms, movement and silence of walking the labyrinth to help your contemplation and nourish your imagination to life.

### For Reflection

#### Numbers 6:24-26

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

#### Celtic Prayer:

*God ahead, God behind  
God be on the path I wind.  
God above, God below  
God be everywhere I go.  
AMEN*

#### History of the Labyrinth

Labyrinths have an ancient history. They are found all over the world. Labyrinths have been around for over 4000 years and are found in just about every major religious tradition in the world. They have been an integral part of many cultures such as Native American, Greek, Celtic and Mayan.

By the 12th century, the Crusades were raging, making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land very dangerous. In order that pilgrimages could continue, seven European cathedrals with labyrinths became the final destinations for pilgrims symbolically representing the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.. Traveling to one of the seven cathedrals with a labyrinth was a much safer means of making a pilgrimage.

The labyrinth at St. Paul's Episcopal Church is based on the pattern of a labyrinth that is set in stone in the great cathedral of Chartres, France. Maintained by Benedictine monks for centuries, Chartres is the most famous Christian labyrinth.

# Labyrinth



*St. Paul's Chartres style labyrinth  
We welcome walkers from dawn to dusk.*

A labyrinth is a spiraling, single path walkway. It is like a narrow two-way street that slowly winds toward the center and back out again. Once at the center, the walker may remain for prayer. When ready, the pilgrim retraces her steps back through the labyrinth and then out the mouth of the labyrinth. A labyrinth is not a maze; once you step into a labyrinth you cannot get lost. It is simply a path to walk that is symbolic of spiritual pilgrimage.

There are no wrong turns, no dead ends. All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other on the path; you will surely reach the center and come back.

Walking the sacred path of the labyrinth is a form of walking meditation. As you walk the path, you become quiet, centered, and more mindful of your actions. By walking the labyrinth, many pilgrims discover their sacred inner space.

Prayerfully walking a labyrinth can be a helpful spiritual tool to quiet the mind, open the heart, and bring new clarity. There is no "right" way to walk a labyrinth; there is simply your way.

**Step by step:** "Solvitur Ambulando" It is solved by walking. (St. Augustine)

Have you ever struggled with sitting still? Sometimes we can find inner peace through walking. For some this becomes a prayer walk. Walking meditations have been a respected form of soul care throughout the ages. Walking meditations with the labyrinth can be a spirituality resource. The labyrinth is a great help for all of us who have trouble sitting still.

There are many ways to walk. This guide has some. You may also walk the Way of the Cross using the pamphlet on the counter inside the front door of the church.

#### Meditation -- Preparation for a labyrinth walk

*"Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Exodus 3:5b*

Whether you pray walking or sitting today, consider removing your shoes for a few moments of prayer and meditation. Feel the ground. Press your toes into it. How does it feel to be on holy ground?

*Prayer: God, bless the very ground under our feet. Amen.*

## About Walking

- ❖ Before entering the labyrinth, spend a few minutes in centering prayer, reading scripture, or listening to music. Be attentive to your breathing, or simply rest in God's presence. Pray for God's presence on your labyrinth walk.
- ❖ As you begin, simply breathe a little slower, breathe a little deeper, walk with God a little slower and enjoy God in community.
- ❖ When you are ready, step onto the labyrinth and enter the path. Pause at the entry as you become fully conscious of stepping into the labyrinth. If others are present, allow about a minute or several turns of the labyrinth to lapse between you and the person in front of you, especially as you reach the turning points on the path.
- ❖ When walking the labyrinth, it is important that you "find your rhythm." Walk at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you move more rapidly than the person in front of you, move around the person. If you are moving more slowly than the person behind you, allow that person to pass.
- ❖ If others are on the path with you, feel free to acknowledge their presence with a smile. Walkers normally do not speak to one another. It is OK to step out of the path to pass someone or to allow someone to pass you. If you prefer, you may maintain your inner focus by refraining from eye contact with those whom you meet.
- ❖ Spend as much or as little time in the center as you please. This can be a time of prayer, a time of resting in God's presence, or a time of self-offering.
- ❖ As you are ready, begin to retrace your steps, carrying with you any insights or blessings you have received.
- ❖ After you leave the labyrinth, spend a few moments again in quiet prayer.

The very act of walking helps us still our hearts and minds, allowing space for God to speak to us. Be conscious of your breathing. Let your breath flow smoothly.

The unpredictability of its twists and turns reminds us to relinquish our need to be in control and to depend on God. The path is a two-way street. If you want to maintain a meditative stance, avoid eye contact.

Each experience in the labyrinth is different. The labyrinth is a way of opening ourselves to what God shares with us on the journey.

### Parts of the walk

There are three different stages of meditation labyrinth walkers may experience although not everyone experiences them and it is important to be open to your own personal experiences. These three types of meditation can be used for prayer and reflective walks of all kinds. They are often called 1) releasing 2) receiving and 3) union.

## Releasing (purgation) - Entering the labyrinth.

The first stage is a quiet moving to the center of the labyrinth. There is an intentional releasing and letting go of the details of your life. This can quiet and even empty your mind. Leave your cares, problems and distractions at the entrance to the sacred space. You may use this time to take stock of life, to offer confession and to seek the power and presence of God. It is an opportunity to focus, to draw closer to the heart of life and faith and the spirit. Become aware of the natural rhythm of your breathing. A formal term for this is "*purgation*." It is an act of shedding thoughts and emotions.

### Questions to guide you:

- ❖ What do I need to leave behind as I enter this sacred space?
- ❖ In what way do I need to be cleansed and forgiven as I approach God?
- ❖ What concerns do I have?
- ❖ What questions do I bring before God?
- ❖ What holy gifts do I need to receive right now in my life?
- ❖ How can I best prepare my heart as I approach God?

## Receiving (illumination) – Resting in the center and visiting the petals of the rosette.

"*Illumination*" is the second stage experienced when you reach the labyrinth center. It is a place of meditation, illumination and reflection. Deep inner thoughts are often able to emerge. Often we find answers within ourselves. Receive what is there for you to receive. Stay there as long as you like.



### In the center

Spend time in the center rosette of the labyrinth. You may sit or stand. This is a time of openness and a time to receive what God has to offer. Visit each of the petals of the rosette either physically by stepping into each of them, or you may simply visit each one in your mind.

### Questions to guide you:

- ❖ What is God saying to me right now?
- ❖ How am I receiving God's word?

## Returning (union) – Leaving the labyrinth using the same path that you took to the center.

As you leave the center, the third stage begins. This is called "*union*." Often we realize if there is action to be taken, we are the ones to initiate it. We can gain inner strength with each step as we return to our lives.

Walkers return to the world in union with God, with the insights God has given. The return follows the same path that you followed inward, but now you are walking illumined and