

Praying the Labyrinth: Introducing A Spiritual Prayer Tool
Center for Continuing Education, Princeton Theological Seminary, May 9, 2009



Outdoor labyrinth, Grace Cathedral San Francisco, California (USA)

Prepared and presented by ©The Rev. Jill K H Geoffrion, Ph.D.
www.jillgeoffrion.com www.fhlglobal.org www.jillgeoffrion.wordpress.com

Our Prayer Song:

We are walking in the love of God, we are walking in the love of God. (2x)

We are walking, we are walking, we are walking in the love of God (2x).



A labyrinth is a pathway that turns back on itself,
(changes direction) before reaching a center.
The origin of the word "labyrinth" is unclear.

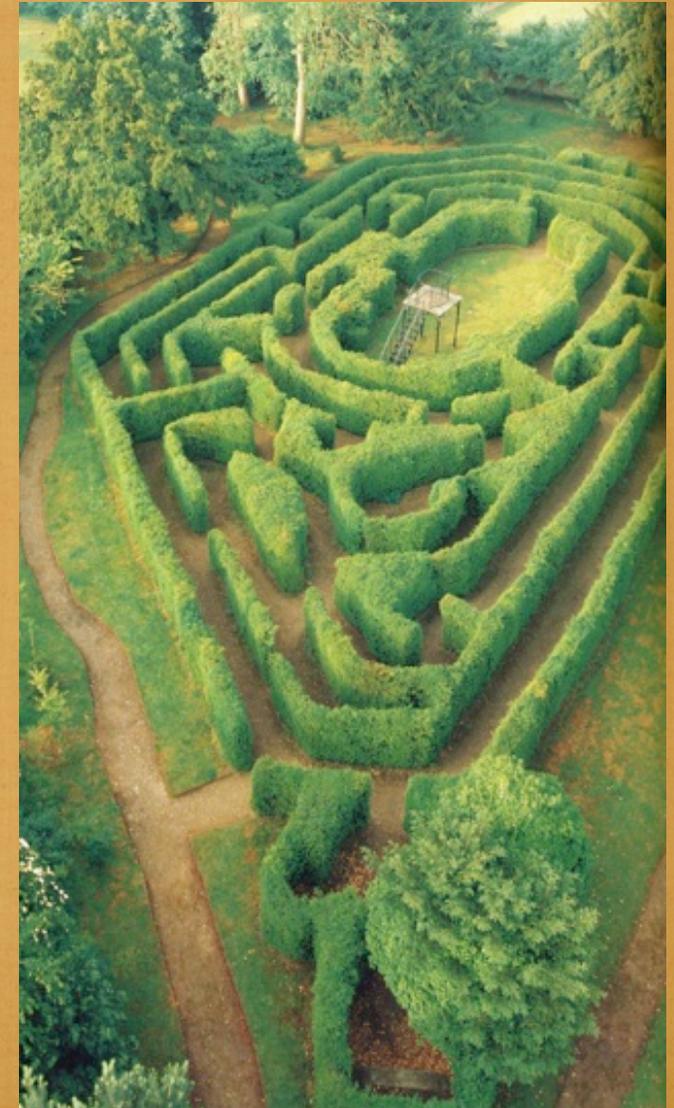


Millenium Park Slate & Grass Labyrinth, Plymouth, Minnesota, USA

Labyrinths are designed to lead you (circuitously) to a center.
Mazes are designed to challenge you with the unsure hope
of arriving at a center. They have different purposes!



Entrance to "Labyrinth" (Maze) in Turubari, Costa Rica
English hedge Maze. Photo ©Jeff Seward



Prayer: connection with God. Labyrinth prayer: moving connection with God.
The labyrinth is a spiritual tool used to facilitate meaningful sacred connections.



Hospital labyrinth Atlanta, Georgia (USA)

People pray on the labyrinth in all the ways they usually pray.
The “right way” to pray a labyrinth
is the way that would be most meaningful for you.

Giving Thanks

Reciting Scripture

Singing

Praying a Question

Open to God's
leading

Praying for others

Resting in Center

Praying for self



University students praying the labyrinth (USA)

Many people enjoy praying with their whole bodies, not just their minds. Labyrinths invite this.



...do you not
know that your
body
is a temple
of the
Holy Spirit within
you?

1 Cor. 6:19

Do not move the
way fear makes
you move. Rumi

Labyrinth of Life, Lakeshore stones on mulch, DeepHaven Retreats, Minnesota (USA)

Labyrinth experiences can be understood as “mini-pilgrimages”,
outer journeys with inner, spiritual purposes.
Like on pilgrimage, the way may seem very long.



Lake stones on mulch labyrinth, Minnesota (USA)

Many people report feeling calm and peaceful during and after praying a labyrinth.



“I was released from my stress bondage.”

Due to the physical design that includes multiple switchback turns, the hemispheres of the brain naturally become more balanced as one walks a labyrinth.

“All I experienced was peace.”

Grass labyrinth mown in a field. Camp Courage, Minnesota (USA)

A world-wide labyrinth movement is growing.
Labyrinths provide a “new” (and ancient) way to pray.



Church sign Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Sign by labyrinth, Trembly Park Geneva, Switzerland

“There have been seven periods of labyrinth ‘flowering’ in history. All occurred during times of rapid change. They usually last about 100 years.”

Jeff Saward, British historian, editor of Labyrinthos, a journal focusing on labyrinths, www.labyrinthos.net.



Riverside Church New York City (USA)

Labyrinth Prayer as Spiritual Practice

The more you “practice”, the more natural and useful it will become.



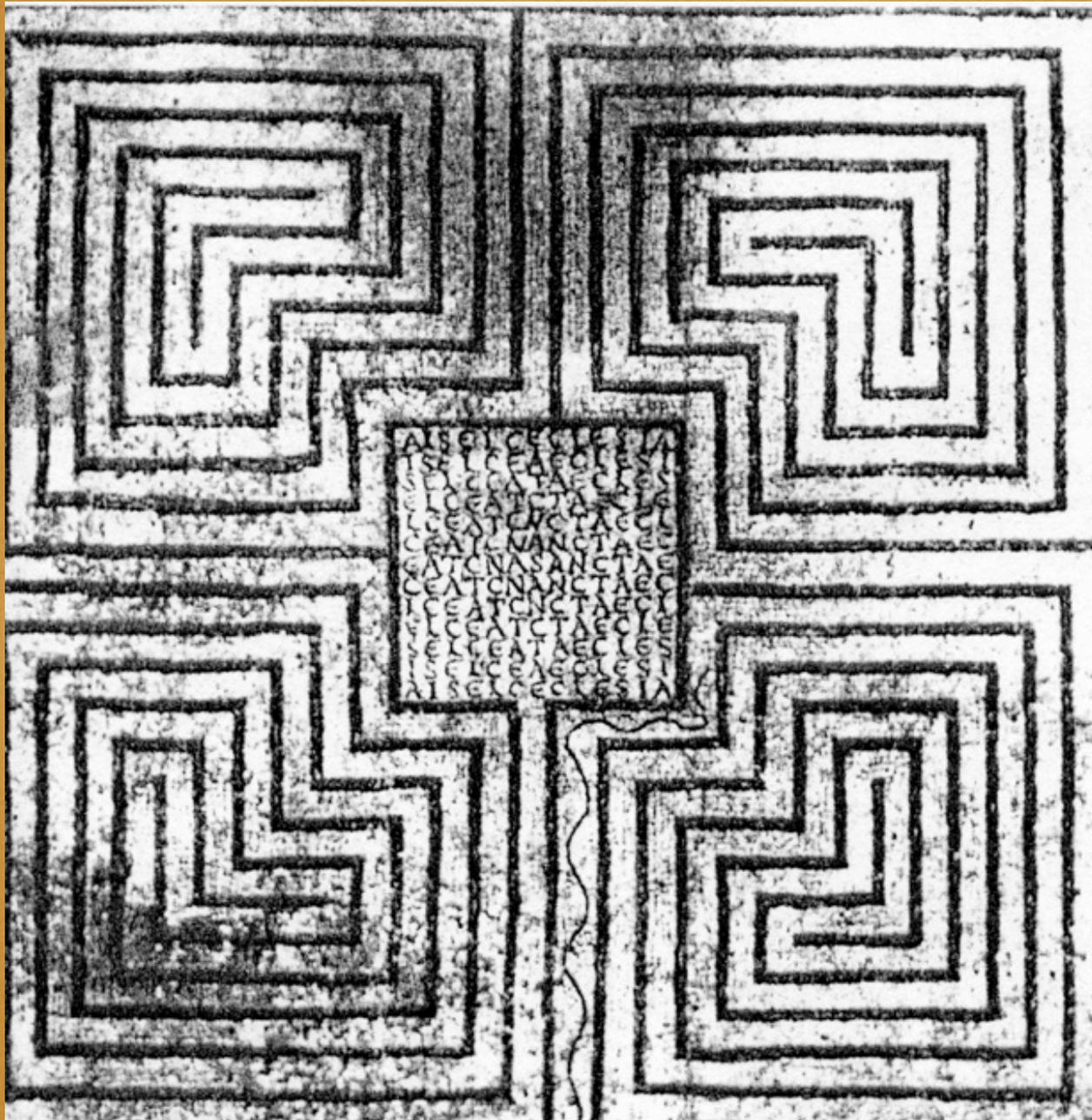
Charism Labyrinth

Christian Use of Labyrinths



Chemin Neuf Communauté Praying together on the labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral

The oldest Christian labyrinth still in existence
can be found in modern day Algiers, Africa is dated from 324 C.E.



“Thus says God:
Stand at the
crossroads
and look,
and ask for
the ancient
paths, where the
good way lies;
and walk in it,
and find rest
for your souls.”

Jeremiah 6:16

Cathedral of Algiers,
Originally in the Baliscal of Reparta,
Al-Asnam, Orléansville

Journeying with God, the path, following God's way, enjoying God's presence...
There are many biblical concepts that relate to praying the labyrinth.

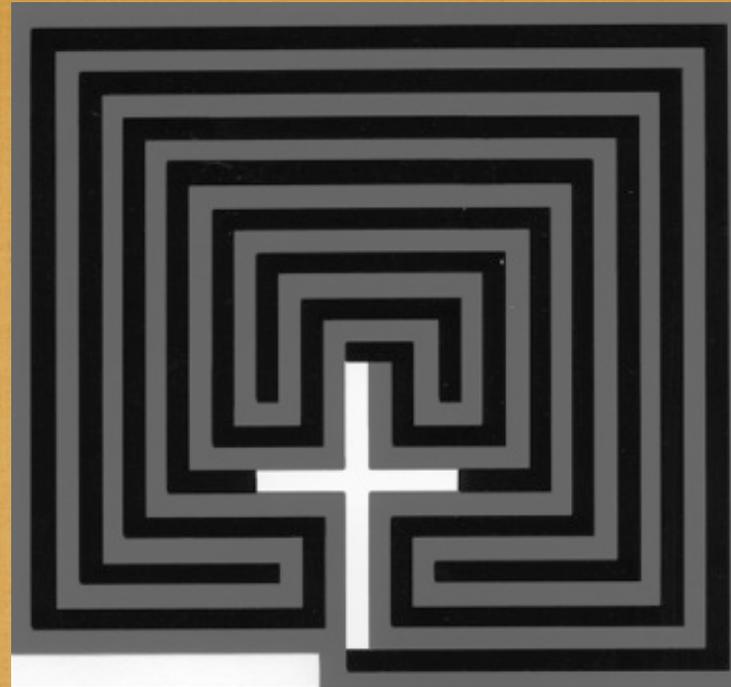


Glenridge Residence Concrete and brick labyrinth, Atlanta Georgia (USA)

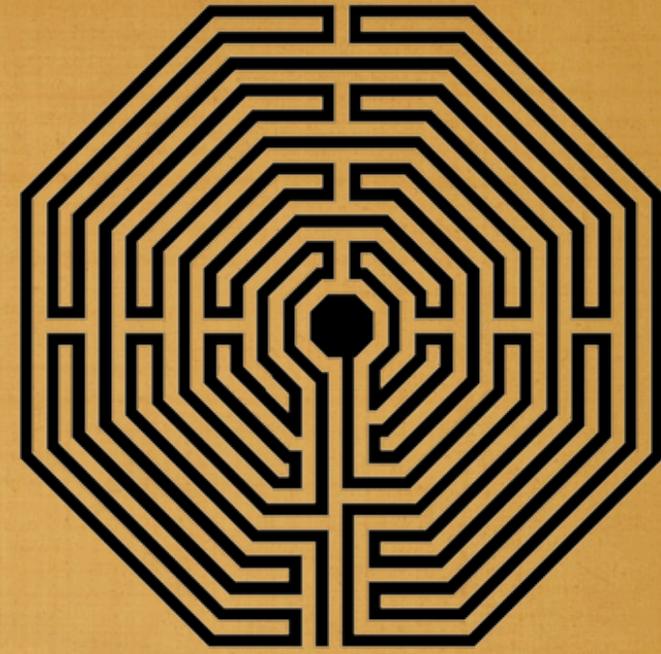
Look for a cross in the center of most labyrinths.



Cross Labyrinth,
©Maia Scott



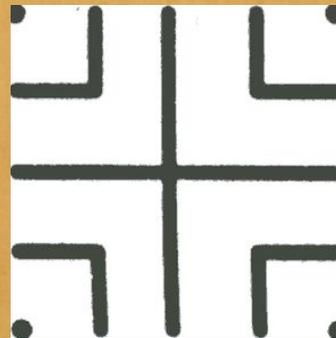
Hansen Art labyrinths, 7 circuit classical
squared, with highlighted crosses.



St. Quentin, France labyrinth,
Prepared by Cindy Pavlinak



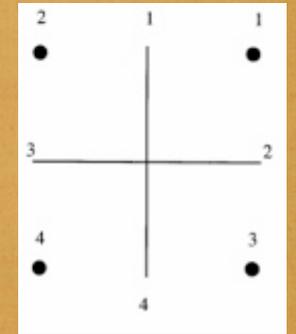
Chartres Labyrinth



7 circuit seed pattern



3 circuit labyrinth



3 circuit seed pattern

“May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Galatians 6:14

Some describe labyrinth prayer as “the laying on of feet”



Outdoor Terrazo Stone Labyrinth Grace Cathedral, California (USA)

The Benefits of Labyrinth Prayer



Labyrinth of Life DeepHaven Labyrinths & Retreats, MN (USA)

Benefit #1: People encounter God in an intentional and extended way.
“As I was moving I began praising God and I had time to stay with my prayer...”



Lai Baptist Women's Prayer Group Yangon, Myanmar

Benefit #2: People report a transformation in their thinking and feeling.
Example: “When I started I was sad. While I was walking I began to feel joy.”



San Francisco Theological Seminary, San Anselmo, California (USA)

Benefit #3: Unarticulated hopes, dreams, values, concerns, priorities, memories, perspectives, and insights surface.
“For the first time I felt that things in our country could change...”



Franciscan Retreat Center, Phoenix, Arizona (USA)

Benefit #4: People realize scriptural truth at a deeper level.
“It was as if Jesus was with me saying, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life’.”



Kitgum Labyrinth, Uganda Photo© Lynn Coghill

Benefit #5: The labyrinth provides a special place to be with God.
“I need a quiet place to go and pray. The labyrinth is my prayer village...”



11 circuit Chartres-style labyrinth, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, California (USA)

Benefit #6: Walkers can experiment with new ways of thinking and acting.
“Every time I had a destructive thought I stopped.
When I was able to let it go, I would start again.”



Rancho de los Caballeros, Wickenburg, Arizona (USA)

Benefit #7: Understanding more about one's experience of faith.
"As I walked, God showed me how He has been working in my life."



Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon, Myanmar)

Walking the Labyrinth: Practical Suggestions



Labyrinth shoveled onto a frozen lake. Wayzata, Minnesota (USA)

A single path always leads to the center.
You cannot “get lost” when praying on a labyrinth, but you can get turned around.



Tree of Wisdom Labyrinth, Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Building, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

When starting to walk after another,
allow a little space so that each person can find her/his own pace.



Episcopal Cathedral, Phoenix, Arizona (USA)

The pace with which you pray the labyrinth will vary. This is okay.
It is proper labyrinth etiquette to walk around others.



Move naturally.

Feel free to walk around people or to let them “pass” you.



HEAL Africa labyrinth Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

If you meet someone going the opposite direction, do whatever you usually do when you meet someone on a narrow path.



7 circuit mounded earth labyrinth, Mendocino, California (USA) Photo © Cindy Pavlinak

When “watching” others praying on the labyrinth, witness what is happening with eyes of faith.



Prayer group supporting one another while walking a labyrinth, Northfield, Minnesota, USA

Walking around the perimeter of the labyrinth can be a helpful way to prepare or bring closure to a labyrinth experience.



Small-scale replica of Chartres-style labyrinth

Welcome the Unexpected!

You don't need to wonder "What kind of experience am I supposed to be having?"
Experience your experience! Greet whatever comes. Pray the distractions.



Labyrinth of Life, Deephaven Labyrinths and Retreats, MN

God can use everything that happens during your labyrinth prayer to teach, encourage, and guide you. Pray the labyrinth as if you were looking into a mirror to understand more of what God wants you to see. No matter what happens, ask yourself, “How is this like my life?”



Columbine Labyrinth, created after the school shooting as a healing space for the community (Colorado, USA)

While the labyrinth is likely to take you places you don't expect to go.
You can always decide what is best for you. You can always leave a labyrinth.



Riverside Church Labyrinth, New York City

A Typical Labyrinth Experience



Colonial Church Labyrinth Retreat Edina, Minnesota (USA)

Make your way to the threshold of a labyrinth.
In prayer, prepare yourself for the journey that is ahead.



prelude...
focus...
intention...
symbolic beginning...

Follow the path where it leads. Pray in any way that flows naturally.



If you were to
trust the path
you are on,
what would you
discover?

Rest with God in the center of the labyrinth. Stay as long as you like. Enjoy!



listen deeply...
wait with God...
receive..
practice sabbath...



Be
here,
now
!!!!!!!

When you are ready, move from the center taking the path towards the threshold (exit/entrance).



Remember to pause at the threshold to give thanks for your experience,
whatever it has been.



Then, reflect on *your* labyrinth prayer. Journal, sketch, or draw *your* experiences or responses to what God was communicating while you prayed the labyrinth.



Begin by documenting what took place-- externally and internally.

Expect the meanings of your experiences to emerge over time.

What questions would be helpful to have answered before we pray the labyrinth?



St. Edwards Episcopal Church labyrinth designed as part of the sanctuary (chairs go on the path dividers), Long Lake, Minnesota, USA