

# Labyrinth Prayer: Walking with God



Musanze, Rwanda



Chartres, France



Deephaven, Minnesota, USA



Yangon, Burma



Unleash creativity



Provide a mirror for understanding my life  
Lanser Labyrinth, AZ



# Why I love praying with labyrinths...



Invite shared visions and experiences



Take me internally  
and externally way beyond  
anywhere I could have imagined!



Expand my horizons  
St. Quentin Labyrinth, France



# Building and walking on labyrinths on four continents







Labyrinths are patterns with a single pathway that turns back on itself before passing through a center. They are enclosed designs with a single opening in the perimeter.



# It is helpful to distinguish between labyrinths



^^^^

Labyrinth  
St. Quentin Cathedral,  
France



and mazes.



<<<<

Maze  
Turubari, Costa Rica



There is a relationship between spirals and labyrinths,  
but they are not the same.





# We do not know the exact origins of labyrinths.

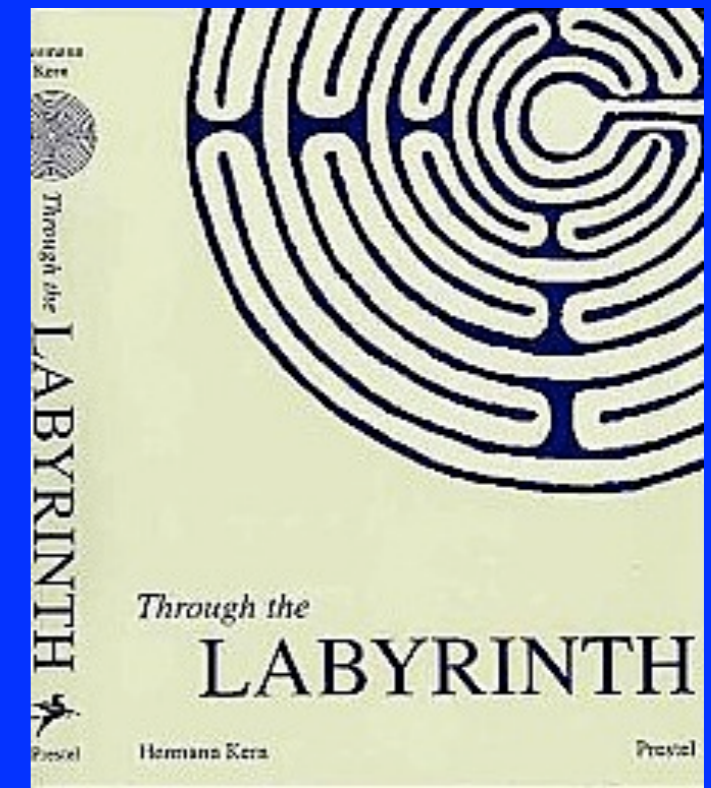
However, there are ancient examples on every inhabited continent.



Theseus and the Minotaur  
Roman Mosaic Labyrinth (275-300 CE)  
now at the Kuntz Museum in Vienna, Austria

Where do we find historical references relating to labyrinths?

1. Movements and dances
2. Literary references
3. Graphic designs



The definitive study of labyrinths by Hermann Kern, *Through the Labyrinth* (New York, Prestel)



“Man in the Maze” Hopi Basket



Goa, India 2,000-2500 BCE

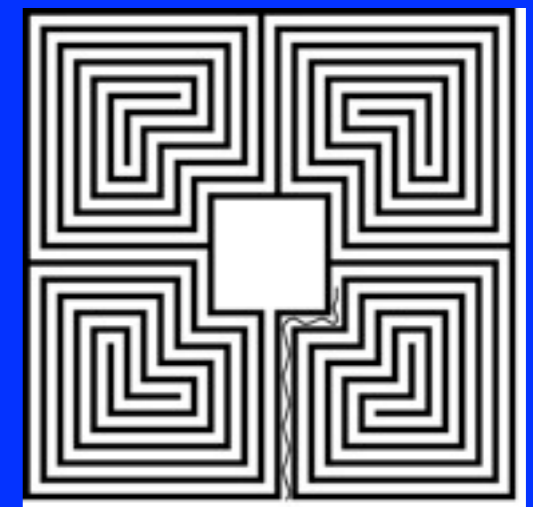
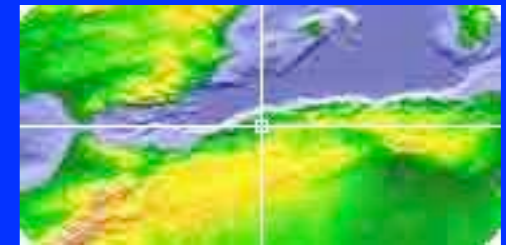
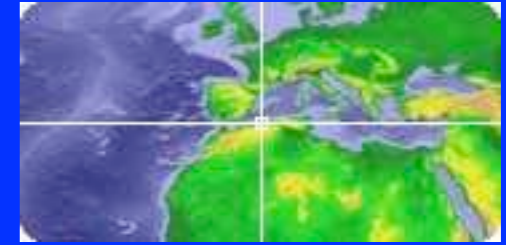
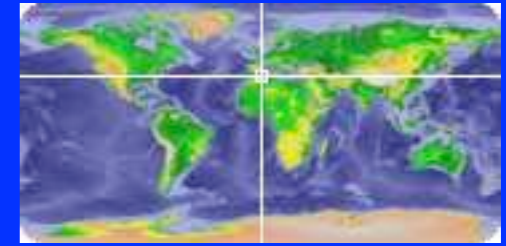
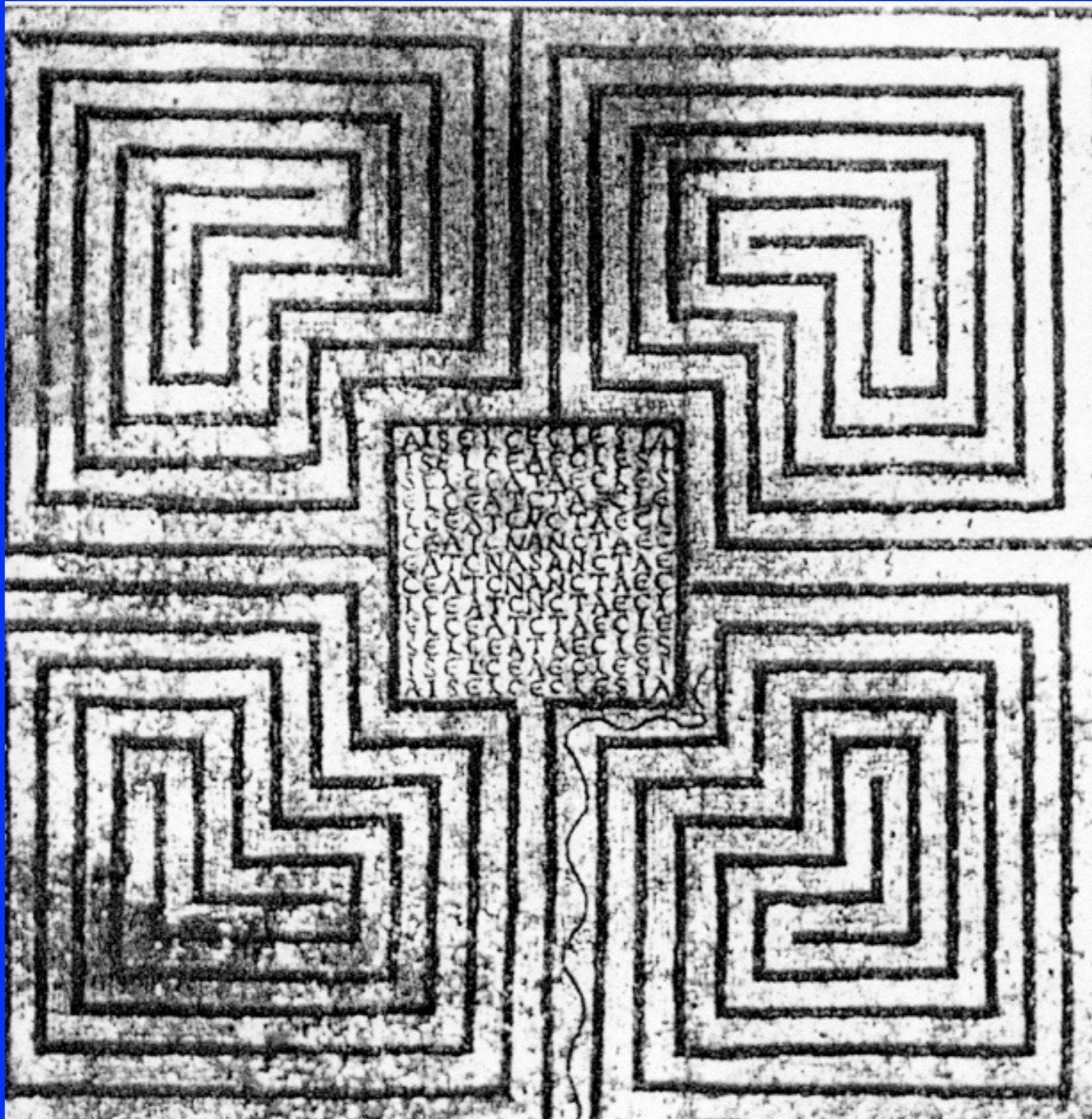
©Jeff Seward see [Labyrinths and Mazes](http://Labyrinths and Mazes) & [www.labyrinthos.net](http://www.labyrinthos.net)



Contemporary Labyrinth Dance



The oldest surviving Christian labyrinth is found in Algeria.



The labyrinth was installed in 324 CE the basilica of Reparta in Al-Ansam, Algeria (North Africa), It is now found in the Cathedral of Algiers.

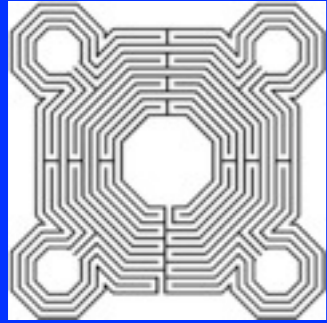




Sens



Reims



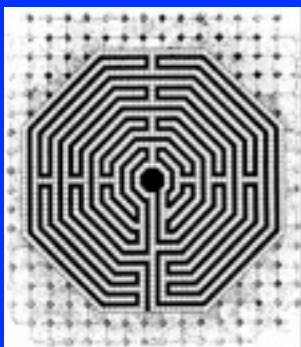
Amiens



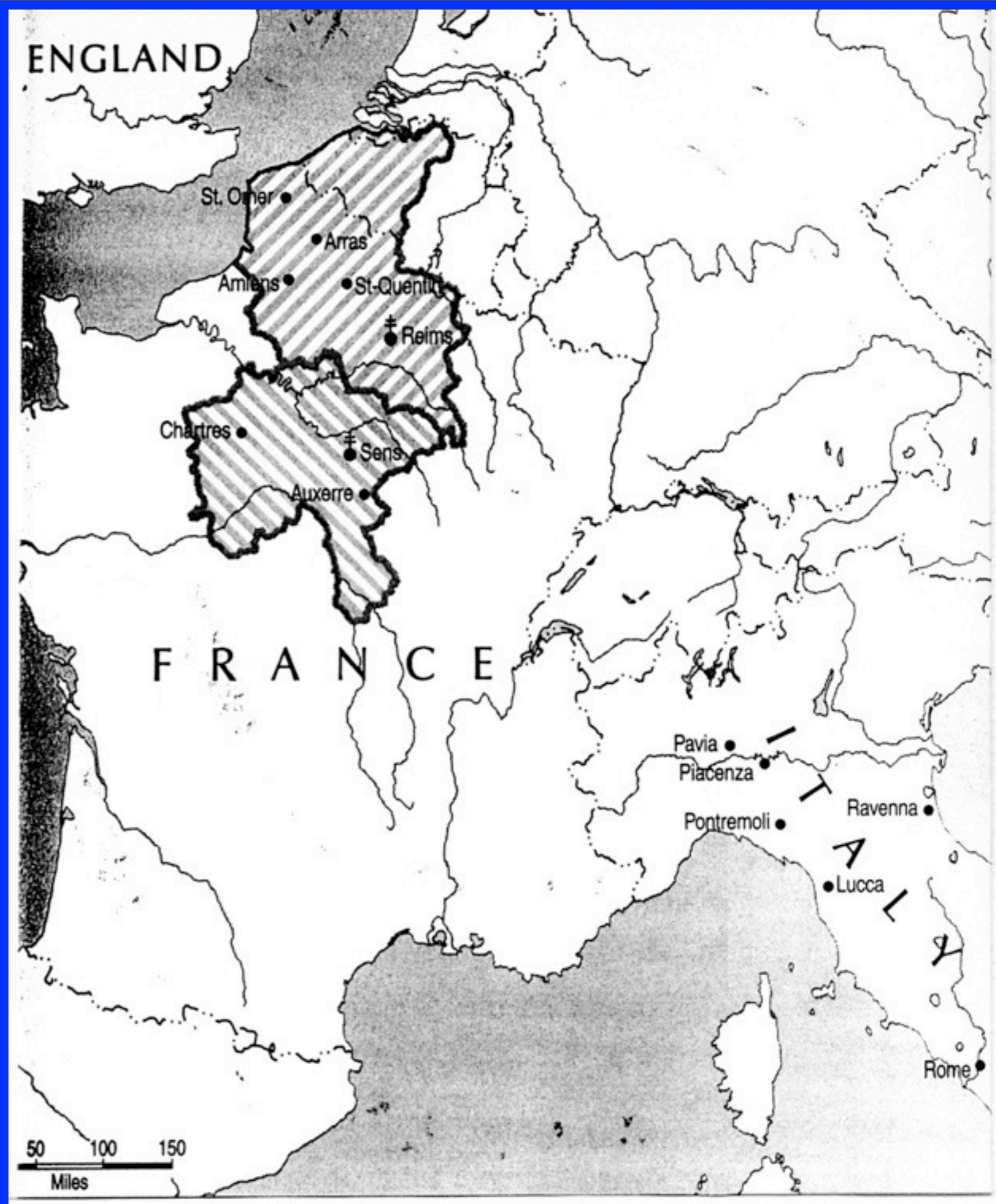
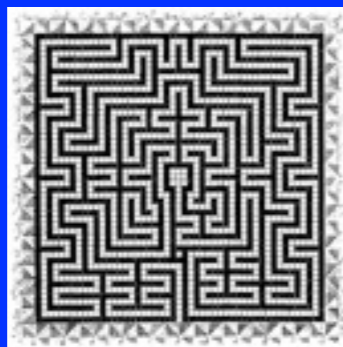
Chartres

# Medieval labyrinths found in France and Italy.

St. Quentin



St. Omer





# Interest in and use of labyrinths is growing world-wide.

Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Sign by labyrinth Trembly Park Geneva, Switzerland



There are approximately 4,000 labyrinths in 75 countries listed on the world-wide labyrinth locator.

Many others exist as well. [www.labyrinthlocator.org](http://www.labyrinthlocator.org)

According to Jeff Saward, leading labyrinth historian, there have been seven periods of labyrinth 'flowering'. All occurred during times of rapid change and usually lasted about 100 years. The current period began in the 1970s.

Jeff Saward, editor of *Labyrinthos*, [www.labyrinthos.net](http://www.labyrinthos.net). See *Labyrinths and Mazes*. (New York: Lark Books), 19.



School labyrinth Kitgum, Uganda  
© Photo Lynn Coghill lcpitt@pitt.edu



This holistic form of prayer involves simultaneous use of the mind, spirit, and body.



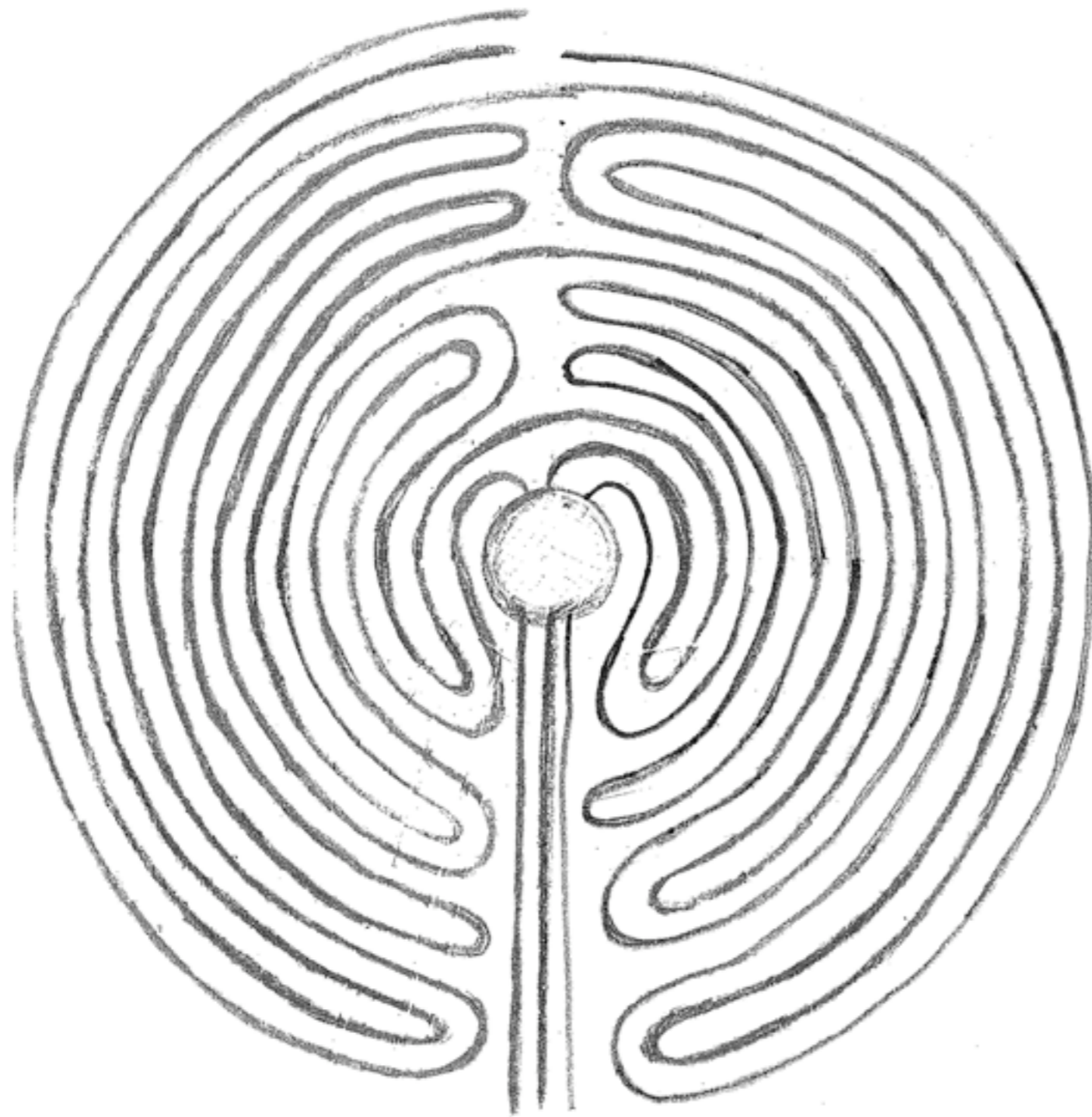
3 circuit labyrinth, Stillwater, MN (USA)

“Keep walking,  
though there’s no  
place to get to.  
Don’t try to see  
through the distance.  
That’s not for human  
beings. Move within,  
but don’t move the  
way fear makes you  
move.

Rumi—Selected Poems  
ed. Coleman Barks

The Labyrinth of Life. Lake Michigan stone on mulch, DeepHaven, Minnesota (USA)





Labyrinths can help us  
to walk together...  
when we are afraid,  
when we yearn for  
forgiveness, and  
as we move towards  
freedom.

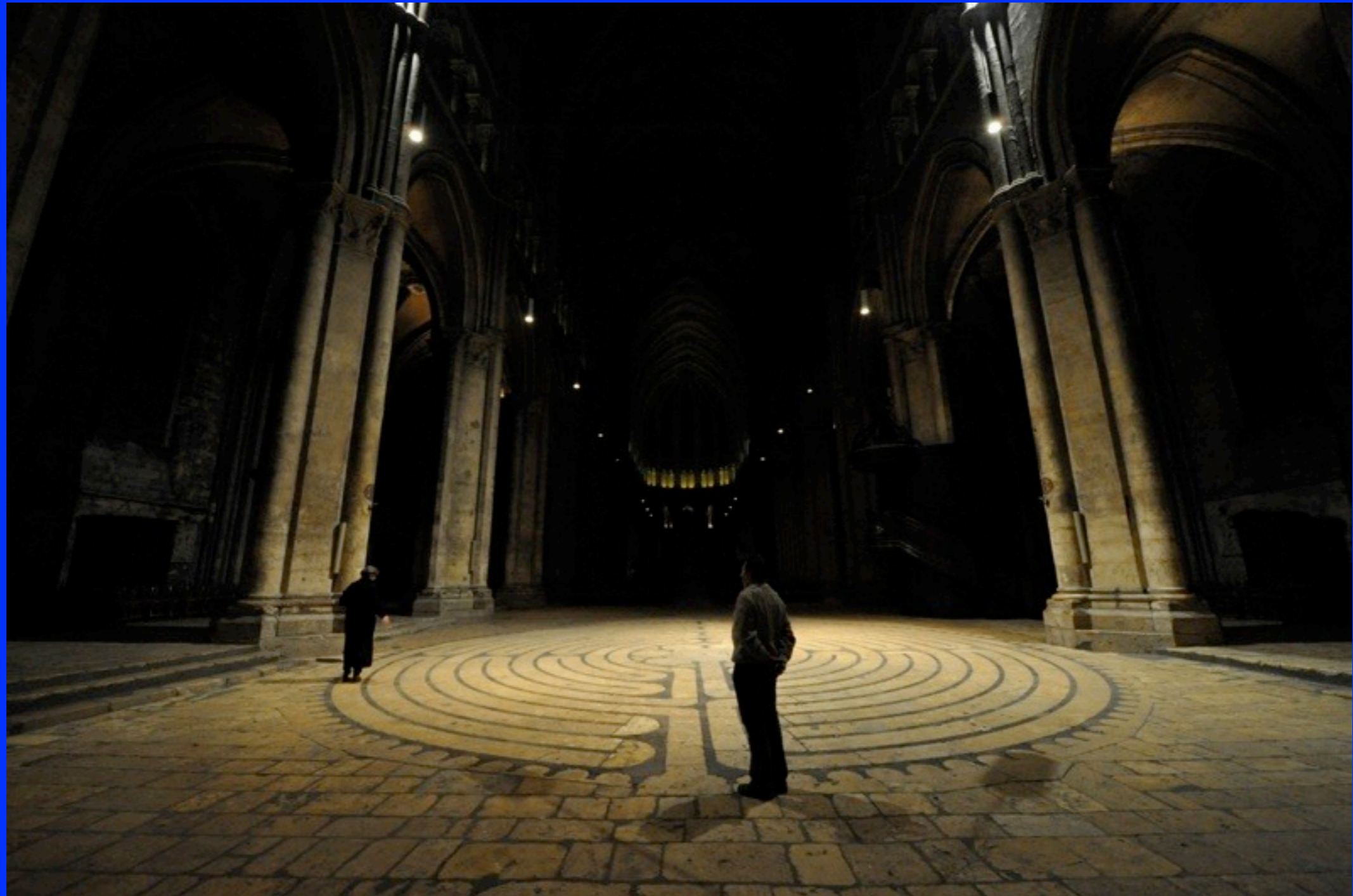
©CFDudley

“Abrahamic Strands”  
3 path labyrinth design  
(in process)



“The bona fide soul journey echoes John Muir’s realization at Yosemite a century ago, “I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found out I was really going in.”

Phil Couisneau in *Pilgrimage*, edited by Sean O’Reilly and James O’Reilly (San Francisco: Travelers’ Tales, 2000) xvi.





Labyrinth walkers report many benefits.



Labyrinth of split wood, laid on the forest floor Stillwater, Minnesota (USA)



## Benefit #2: Mingling of communal and individual experience.

“Even though I focus on what is happening for me, I love feeling connected to those who share the path.”



Center Prayer Gresham, Oregon



Appleton Dance Oregon Lab Event





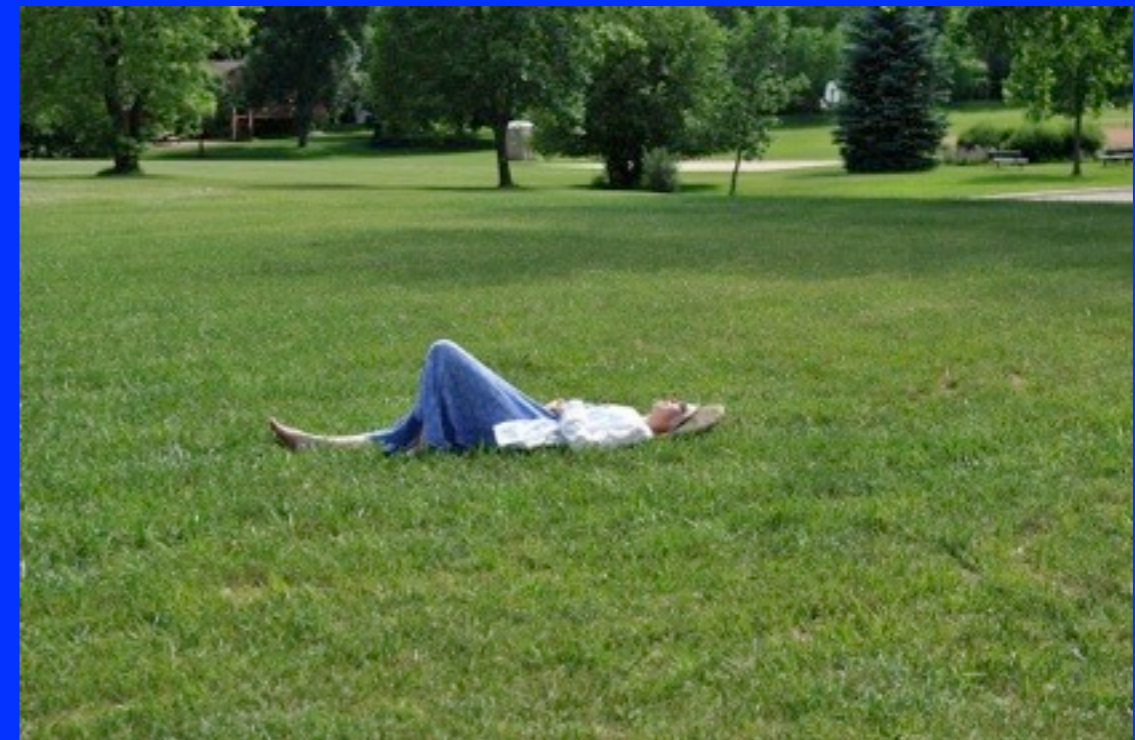
Benefit #3: Labyrinths are “sacred space” where people feel safe to explore their relationship with the Holy.  
“I need a quiet place to pray. The labyrinth has become my prayer village.” A Burmese Christian



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



Paver Chartres-style labyrinth  
Mission of the Atonement Church Beaverton, Oregon (USA)



Grass & Brick labyrinth Presbyterian Church of the Apostles  
Burnsville, MN (USA)



Benefit #4: Transformation of thoughts and feelings.  
“When I started I felt anxious. Now I am feeling peaceful.”



San Francisco Theological Seminary San Anselmo, California (USA)



Benefit #5: Unarticulated hopes, dreams, values, priorities, memories, perspectives, or insights emerge.

Now I know the next step I would like to take..."

"For the first time I felt that things in my country could change..." Burmese pastor



The Port Street Labyrinth, A ministry of Amazing Grace Lutheran Church "Troubled" neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



## Benefit #6: Mirroring of what is happening in one's life.

Experiences on the labyrinth serve as metaphors, leading to deeper insight and understanding.



Jade-stone paver labyrinth, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon, Burma



Benefit #7: The realization of spiritual truth at a deeper, more personal level.  
“As I went around and around I came to understand that God really is the light of the whole world.”



Temporary labyrinth of lava stones. HEAL Africa Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo



# Labyrinth Prayer



John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo



# Labyrinth Prayer



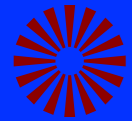
John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



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HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo



Builds community (alone/together; rituals)



# Labyrinth Prayer



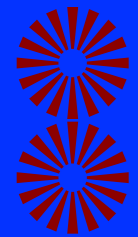
John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo



Builds community (alone/together; rituals)

Enhances creativity (activating both brain hemispheres)



# Labyrinth Prayer



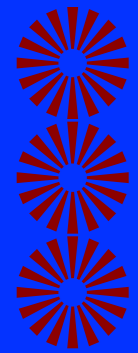
John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo



- Builds community (alone/together; rituals)
- Enhances creativity (activating both brain hemispheres)
- Shifts emotions (joy, peace)



# Labyrinth Prayer



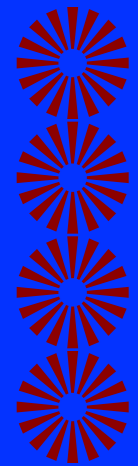
John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo



- Builds community (alone/together; rituals)
- Enhances creativity (activating both brain hemispheres)
- Shifts emotions (joy, peace)
- Supports healing (hospitals, therapeutic tool, ADHD)



# Labyrinth Prayer



John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo

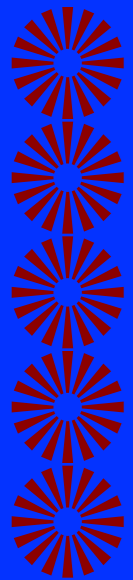
Builds community (alone/together; rituals)

Enhances creativity (activating both brain hemispheres)

Shifts emotions (joy, peace)

Supports healing (hospitals, therapeutic tool, ADHD)

Integrates mind-body-spirit





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John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



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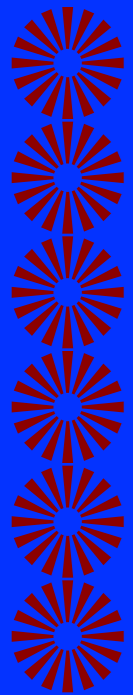
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Supports healing (hospitals, therapeutic tool, ADHD)

Integrates mind-body-spirit

Stimulates thinking (insights, answers, metaphor)





# Labyrinth Prayer



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Lai Baptist  
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HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo

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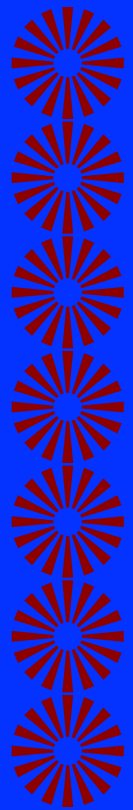
Shifts emotions (joy, peace)

Supports healing (hospitals, therapeutic tool, ADHD)

Integrates mind-body-spirit

Stimulates thinking (insights, answers, metaphor)

Balances the body (health, grounding, pain management)





# Labyrinth Prayer



John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo

Builds community (alone/together; rituals)

Enhances creativity (activating both brain hemispheres)

Shifts emotions (joy, peace)

Supports healing (hospitals, therapeutic tool, ADHD)

Integrates mind-body-spirit

Stimulates thinking (insights, answers, metaphor)

Balances the body (health, grounding, pain management)

Fosters socio-psychological growth (self-knowledge)



# Labyrinth Prayer



John Hopkins Hospital Baltimore, Maryland (USA)



Lai Baptist  
Women's Prayer Group, Burma



HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo

Builds community (alone/together; rituals)

Enhances creativity (activating both brain hemispheres)

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Supports healing (hospitals, therapeutic tool, ADHD)

Integrates mind-body-spirit

Stimulates thinking (insights, answers, metaphor)

Balances the body (health, grounding, pain management)

Fosters socio-psychological growth (self-knowledge)

Enriches spirituality (incarnational prayer)



# Labyrinths As Tools for Praying with our Bodies, Minds, and Souls



Prayer in the center of a labyrinth made from plastic tape and sheet metal nails, Butembo D. R. Congo



Labyrinth prayer offers a contemplative way of approaching and resting in God's presence... The invitation is to...become quiet within, to slow down, not to "escape" from the world, but to attend to all of life with "quiet still awareness", through the lens of the great love of God.

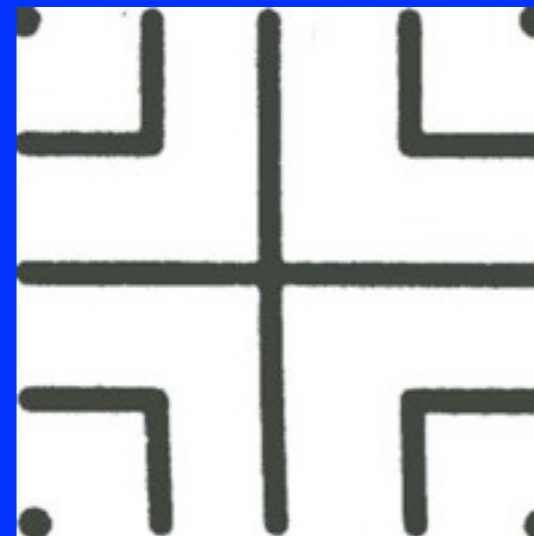
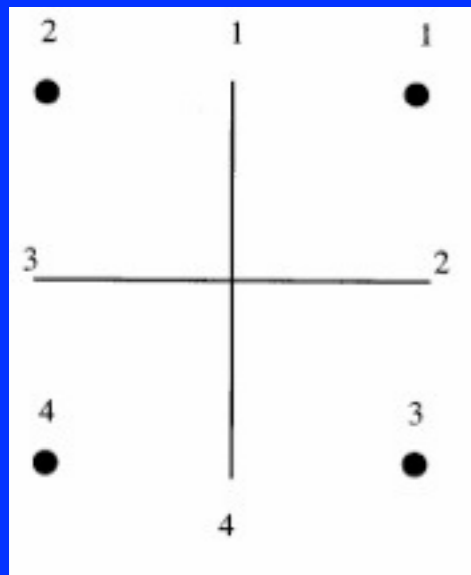
Robyn & Bronwyn Pryor Melbourne, Australia



Episcopal Church Sarasota, Florida (USA)



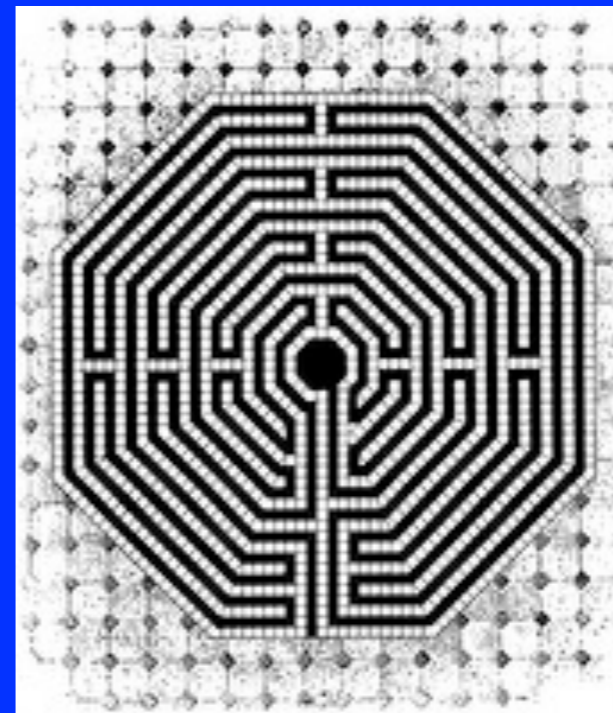
The notion of “grounding” is embedded in most labyrinth patterns.



Seed pattern and 3 circuit labyrinth

Seed pattern and 7 circuit labyrinth

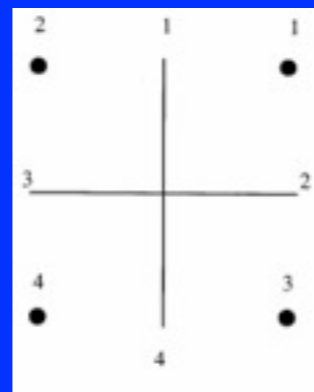
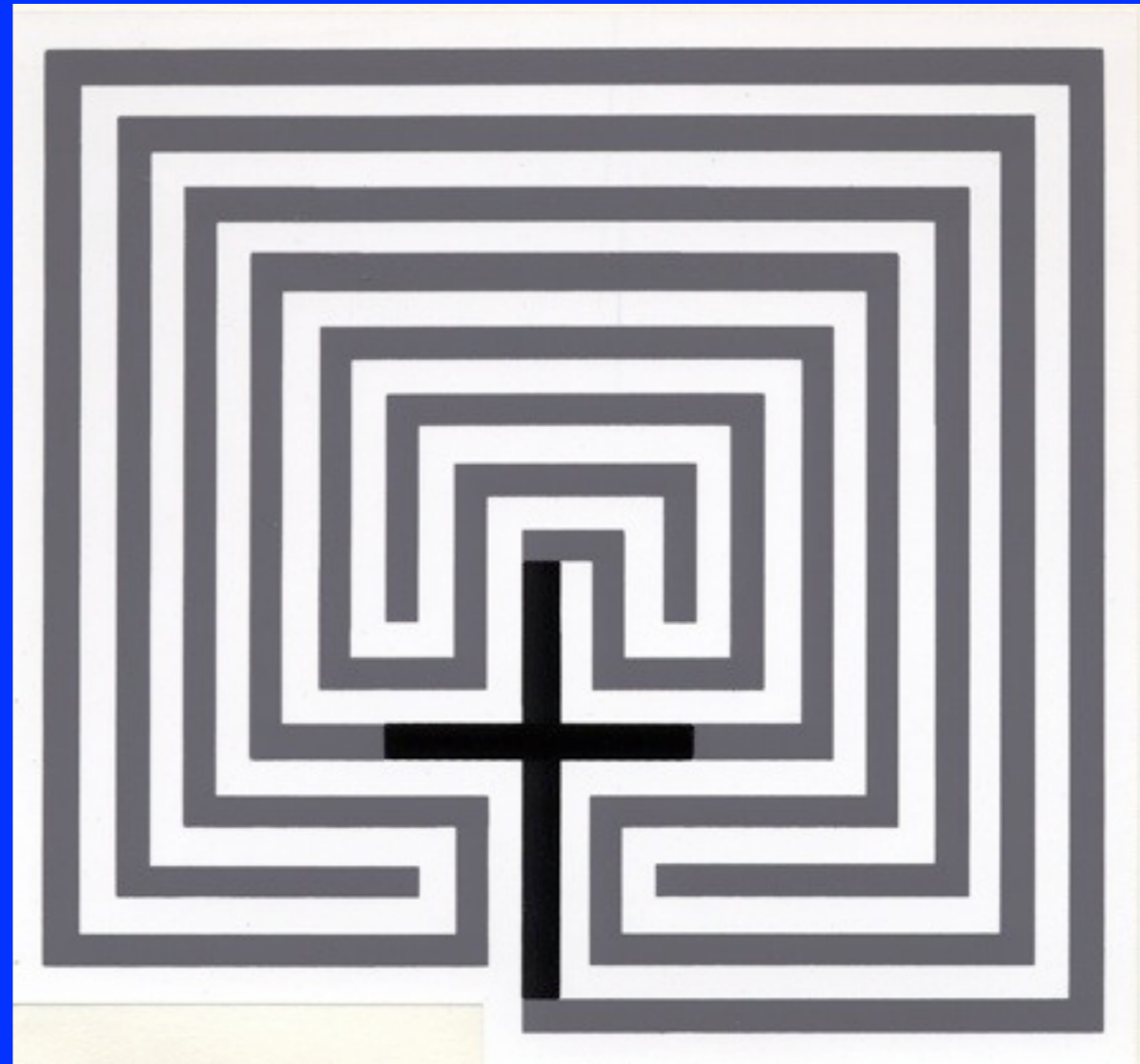
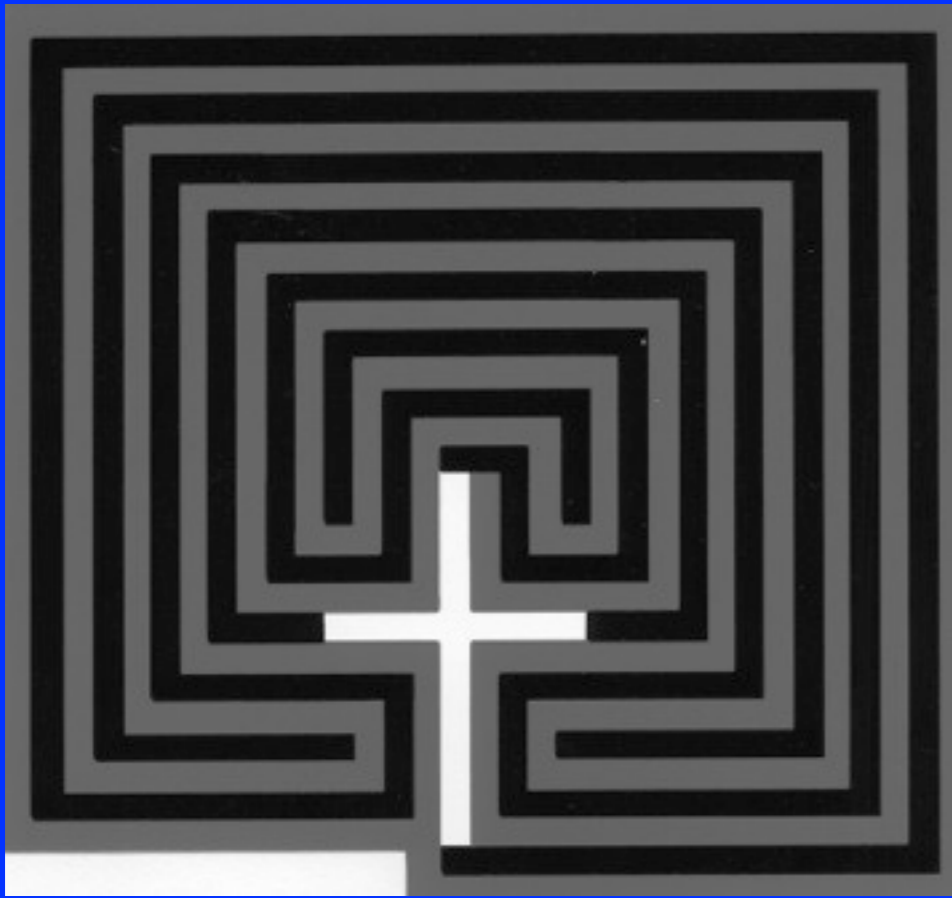
Circular Labyrinth  
Chartres, France  
Drawn by Robert Ferré  
[labyrinth-enterprises.com](http://labyrinth-enterprises.com)



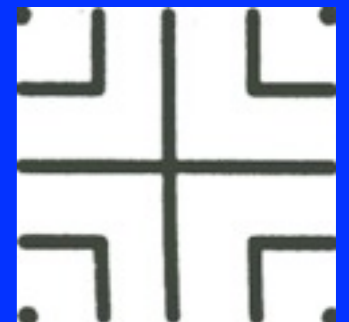
Octagonal Labyrinth  
St. Quentin, France  
©Cindy Pavlinac  
[sacred-land-photography.com](http://sacred-land-photography.com)



For Christians, walking the labyrinth can be understood as walking the way of the Cross.



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



It was on the cross that Jesus offered forgiveness, "Father, forgive them..." Luke 23:34



Some describe walking the labyrinth as “the laying on of feet.”



Praying a labyrinth in response to the tsunami in Asia, 2005  
Temporary Shell Labyrinth Benedictine Monastery St. Paul, Minnesota (USA)



Journeying with God, The Path, Following God's way...  
There are many biblical concepts that relate to praying the labyrinth.



Friday open labyrinth walk Chartres Cathedral, France



What we bring to a labyrinth experience influences what we take from it.  
As Christians, Jesus walks with us as we move on the labyrinth.



Church Garden Labyrinth, 7 circuit "heart of Chartres", Baltimore, Maryland, USA



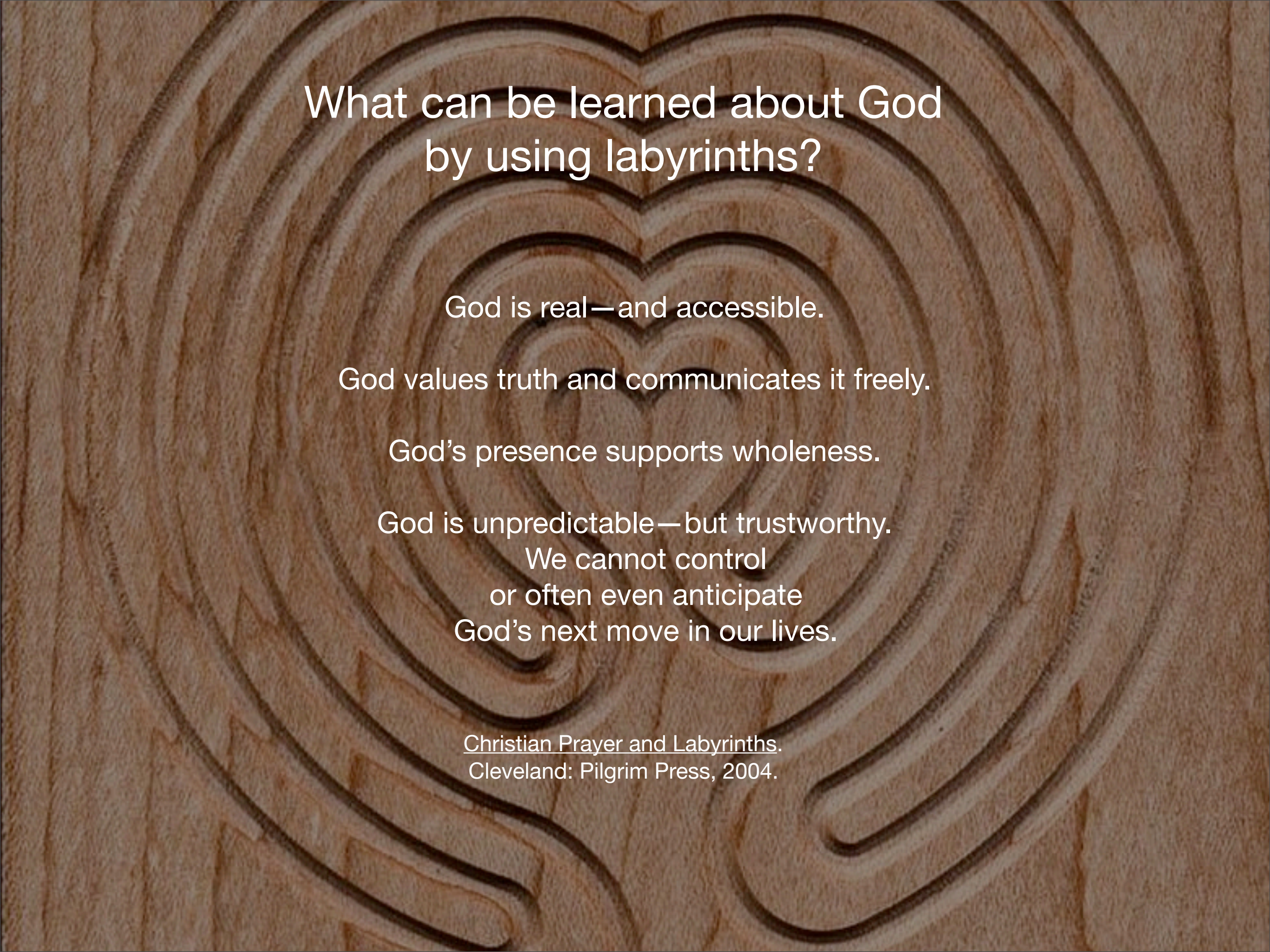


What are some of the theological messages of labyrinths?

- Divine help is available.
- A path of wisdom leads one towards God.
- Religious devotion can be intensely pleasurable.
- Truth and God's presence are yoked. As one moves in the Divine Presence, truth becomes clearer and more compelling.
- Moving one's body in faith can support one's desire for spiritual connection.
- Journeying towards intimacy with God is seldom a linear process.
- Sacred patterns can assist seekers in moving beyond their own limitations. God speaks through visual symbols.
- Love for God leads to personal encounters with the Divine, and to a commitment to acting in faith.
- Desire for wider service springs naturally from time spent with God.

Taken from Christian Prayer and Labyrinths.  
Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004.





# What can be learned about God by using labyrinths?

God is real—and accessible.

God values truth and communicates it freely.

God's presence supports wholeness.

God is unpredictable—but trustworthy.

We cannot control  
or often even anticipate  
God's next move in our lives.

Christian Prayer and Labyrinths.  
Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004.



Using the labyrinth as a spiritual practice:  
the more you “practice”, the more natural labyrinth prayer becomes.



Charism Labyrinth, created for prayers of reconciliation. Design: The Rev. Dr. Cheryl F. Dudley



# Practical suggestions for praying with a labyrinth



Snow and ice labyrinth (shoveled on a frozen lake) Lake Minnetonka Wayzata, Minnesota (USA)



There is no one “right way” to use a labyrinth.  
People pray the labyrinth in the many ways.



Praying for others  
Resting in center  
Praying for self

Open to God's  
leading

Reciting Scripture

Praying a question

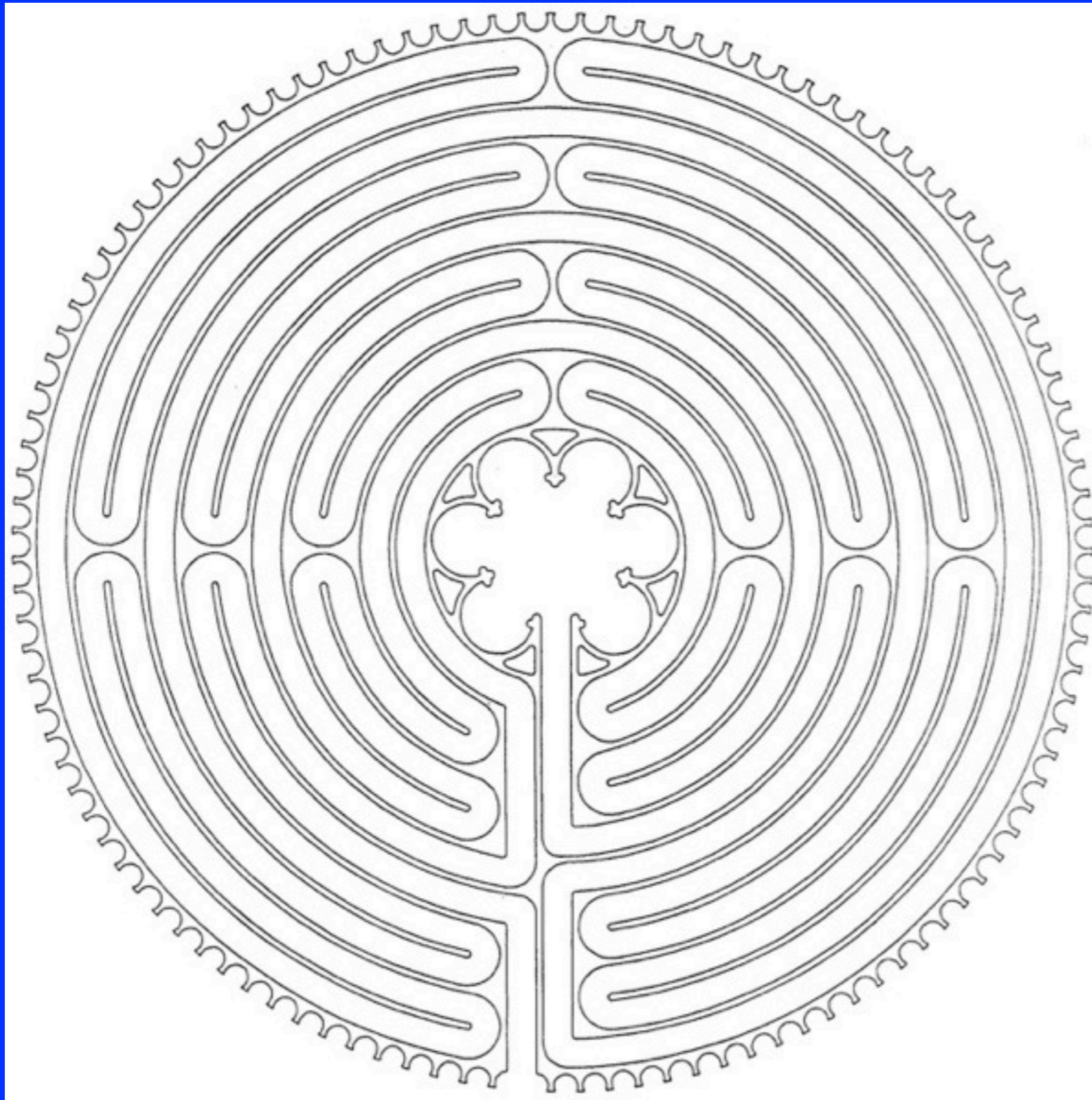
Singing

Using a favorite or  
habitual way to pray

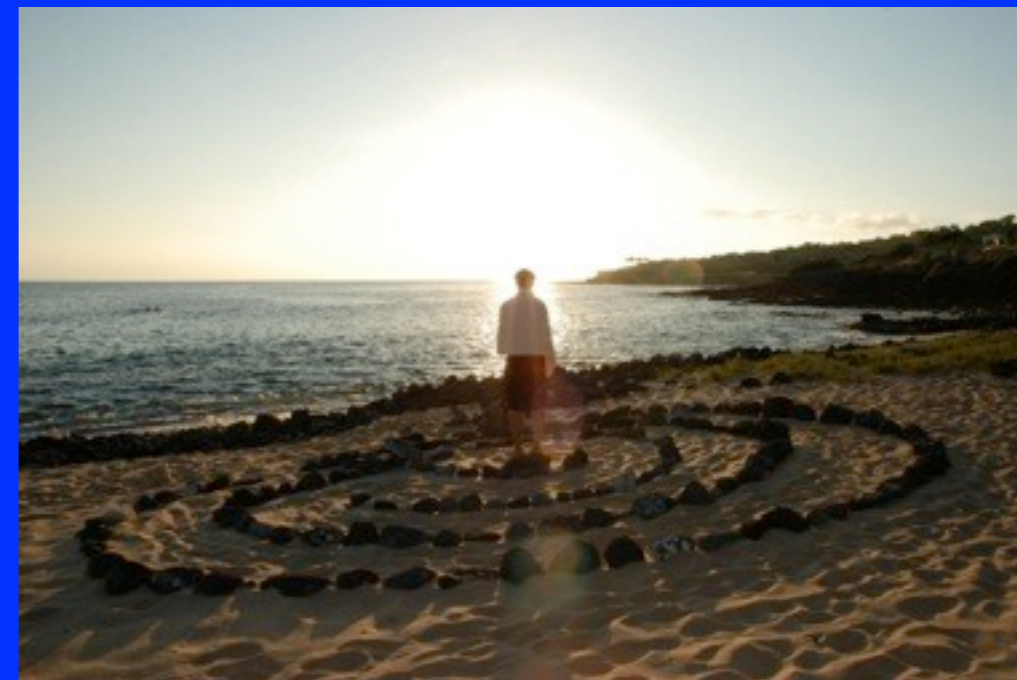
University students on a grass and brick Chartres-style labyrinth (Minnesota, USA)



You can pray a labyrinth with your feet, eyes, or hand.



Secret Garden Labyrinth Minnesota (USA)



Beach labyrinth of sand and lava stones  
Hawaii (USA)



You can not “get lost” when praying on a labyrinth, but you can get turned around.  
If that happens, you will either end up at the threshold or the center.  
Wherever you arrive, you can decide what to do next. You can end your walk or continue.



Harvest labyrinth made of the fall fruits of the garden Minneapolis Convention Center, USA



Approaching a labyrinth walk with curiosity is likely to enhance your experience.  
(It is helpful to release specific expectations related to what might happen.)



Friends and Family Labyrinth, DeepHaven Retreat Center, Minnesota (USA)



Pay attention to what is happening in the environment and inside of you. Incorporate it all as you pray. The labyrinth often functions like a mirror in which you can see your life more clearly than usual.



Labyrinth built for community healing after the school shooting at the high school. Columbine, Colorado (USA)



Like all pilgrimages, journeying on a labyrinth takes time.  
On this outer journey with an inner spiritual purpose you may need patience!



Franciscan Retreat Center Phoenix, Arizona (USA)



Welcome everything that happens, even if it is unexpected!  
Pray everything, including the “distractions”.



Labyrinth of Life “Dancing Woman” (baltic wheel) pattern DeepHaven, Minnesota (USA)



On a labyrinth walk, tears can be as useful as laughter.



Entrance to the Companion Labyrinth. DeepHaven Labyrinths and Retreats. Minnesota (USA)



Using a labyrinth  
may take you places  
you don't expect to go.

You can always decide to do  
what is best for you.



Riverside Church Labyrinth,  
New York City (USA)

You are always free  
to leave the labyrinth.

Just walk off!

You can always return  
if/when you are ready.



Canvas 7 circuit Chartres-style labyrinth Princeton  
Theological Seminary, New Jersey (USA)



# Movements of a “Typical” Labyrinth Walk



Canvas painted labyrinth   Petite 7-circuit Chartres design   Colonial Church of Edina, Minnesota (USA)



## Preparation

Pause before the threshold of a labyrinth to prepare yourself for the journey ahead.



prelude...

setting you  
intention...

making a  
symbolic  
gesture of  
faith...

Wooden Chartres-style lap labyrinth designed for the visually challenged





Temporary labyrinth in a field next to a youth center and a school. Musanze, Rwanda



If you prefer not to walk the labyrinth, you can witness (rather than watch) others, and pray for them.



Landscape labyrinth of rocks, sand and plants Frost property Northfield, Minnesota (USA)



## Crossing the Threshold

Enter the labyrinth. Follow the path, moving from the threshold to the center.



If I were to trust the path I am on,  
especially when I wonder "Am I lost?"  
what would I discover?





When starting to walk in a group,  
wait until the person in front of  
you goes around the first turn.

Phoenix Cathedral, Arizona (USA)

Pastors' Leadership Workshop, Goma D. R. Congo

This gives her/him time  
and space to find an initial rhythm  
that feels comfortable.

Then, it's your turn to cross  
the threshold.





# The pace with which you move the labyrinth may vary, even during the same walk. This is okay.

Depending on what is happening inside of you, move as quickly or slowly as seems best.



Refugees from Ethiopia run the labyrinth, Minnesota (USA)

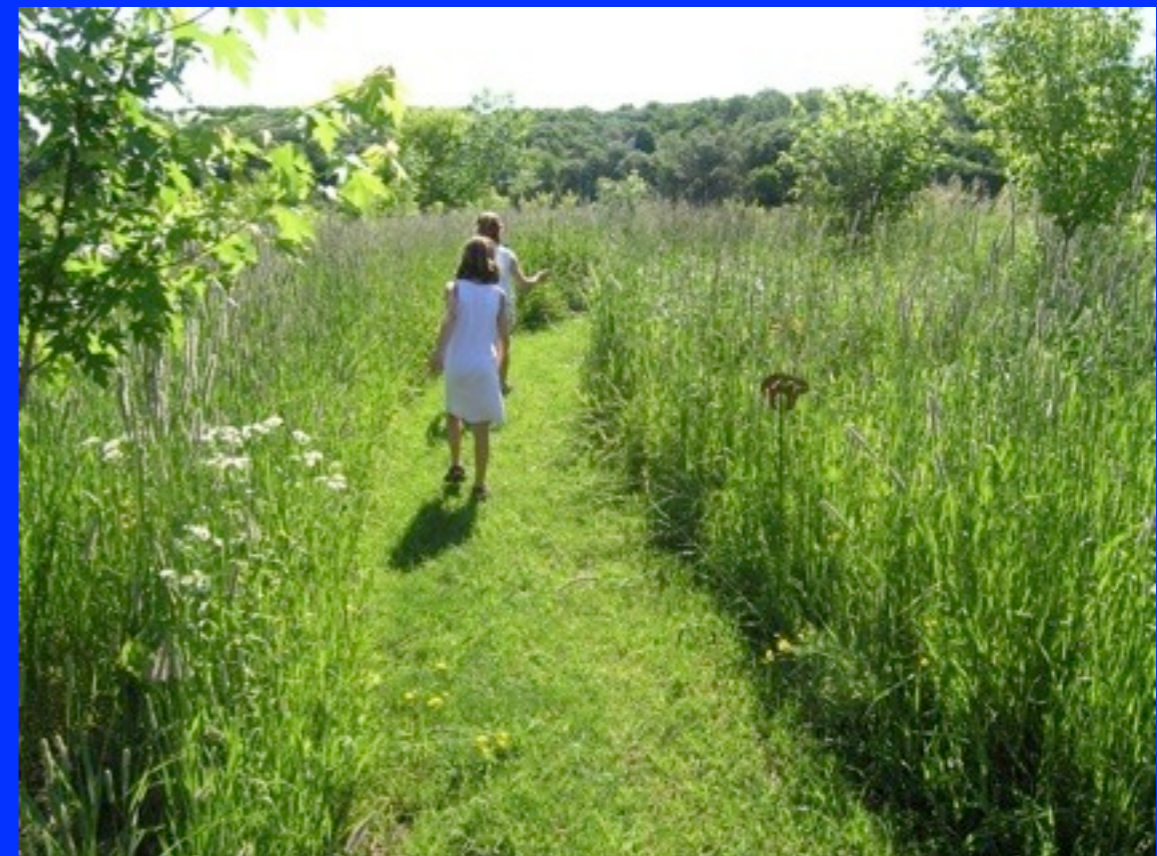


American Baptist Headquarters Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (USA)

Photo © CFDudley



Canvas "Godsong" Labyrinth, New York (USA) 50th birthday ritual & celebration



Chartres-style Prairie Labyrinth Northfield, Minnesota (USA)



Feel free to move around another person, let someone “pass” you, or pause. Labyrinth etiquette allows for all these options!



Lava and plastic construction tape labyrinth at HEAL Africa Goma, D. R. Congo





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

You can always step aside, or let the other person do so.

Highlands Ranch, Colorado (USA)



Turning (rounding the 28 semi-circular turns) is a significant part of one's labyrinth experience.  
Pay attention to the ways in which not only your body, but also your thoughts and emotions shift.





## Experiencing the Center (Heart of the Labyrinth)

Pause when you reach the center of the labyrinth. Stay as long as you would like. There is no need to hurry away!



Wait with God.  
Receive whatever  
is being offered.  
Listen.  
Practice sabbath.







Deephaven Labyrinths and Retreats. Minnesota (USA)





Evergreen, Colorado (USA)



The “petals” of the central flower can be a welcome spot for restful prayer.



Pastors' Leadership Training Event. Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo



# Returning

When you are ready, leave the center and follow the path back towards the threshold (exit/entrance).





# Leaving the labyrinth

Before crossing the threshold, stop. Prepare yourself to leave.

You may wish to  
express thanks  
for whatever has  
happened.







Student preparing to leave the labyrinth.  
Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo



Walking around the perimeter of a labyrinth can help to bring closure to a labyrinth experience.



Ministers praying the labyrinth in Musanze, (northern) Rwanda



# The next step: integration of the experience and your life





## Integration

Begin by documenting what took place—externally and internally.



Then, reflect on your experiences.

Journaling or sketching can be useful.



Expect the meanings of your experiences to be revealed over time.



What questions would you like to have answered before we pray the labyrinth?



St. Edward's Episcopal Church. After the church burned down, a new sanctuary was designed using a labyrinth. The altar is in the center. Long Lake, Minnesota (USA)



Thank you  
for this opportunity to introduce labyrinth prayer to you!



DeepHaven brick and grass labyrinth, Minnesota, USA



# Useful Websites on Labyrinths



Christian Labyrinth Prayer

[www.jillgeoffrion.com](http://www.jillgeoffrion.com); [www.fhlglobal.org](http://www.fhlglobal.org)

Finding a labyrinth near you (worldwide)

[www.labyrinthlocator.com](http://www.labyrinthlocator.com)

Labyrinth construction

[www.labyrinth-enterprises.com](http://www.labyrinth-enterprises.com)

International Labyrinth Society

[www.labyrinthsociety.org](http://www.labyrinthsociety.org)

Labyrinthos: Academic Journal

[www.labyrinthos.net](http://www.labyrinthos.net)