

LABYRINTH PATHWAYS



8th Edition : September 2014

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In Support of Labyrinths
Photograph by Jeanie W. Donohue

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Contents

Frontis : In Support of Labyrinths. Photo by Jeanie W. Donohue	1
Editorial : Kimberly Lowelle Saward & Jeff Saward	3
The Answer is Blowing in the Wind : Jeanie Wu	4
Inter-Faith Labyrinth Prayer in Myanmar : Jill K.H. Geoffrion	9
A Trilogy of Labyrinth Poems : Laurie Lambert	16
Labyrinth: A Field of Compassion : Donna Varnau	22
Finding my Path on the Labyrinth : Tina Proctor	26
The Labyrinth Society : John W. Rhodes	31
Book Reviews	32



*World Labyrinth Day 2014 – Walking as One at One
but the tide waits for no one!
Southend-on-Sea, England - photo by Jeff Saward*

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Inter-Faith Labyrinth Prayer in Myanmar

Jill K H Geoffrion

Creating a labyrinth and offering a labyrinth program were academic requirements for the master-level course on Labyrinth Prayer taught at the Myanmar Institute of Theology during the 2013-2014 academic year. Four students proposed building two temporary labyrinths at a community center in Yangon in order to invite youth to walk for love and peace.



Jill and graduate students in the center of a temporary Chartres-style labyrinth they built together

The students identified three goals:

- 1... To introduce labyrinths and labyrinth walking to 50 youths, ages 12-16.
- 2... To help the students who came from Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Animist, and Christian religious backgrounds experience unity as they walked and prayed together.
- 3... To make the first step towards installing a permanent labyrinth at the center.



Theology student introducing finger labyrinths



Youth participants at the community center

Two labyrinth patterns were identified as supporting these goals:

1. The “Tree.” The students who had been introduced to this pattern as the 7 circuit classical labyrinth called it the “Tree” because that is what the pattern looked like to their Myanmar eyes.



“Tree Labyrinth”: White bricks dug into the ground

2. The “Love” Labyrinth. One of the students (KZM) studied various heart patterns he found on the internet and created a heart-shaped labyrinth pattern that would fit well at the center.



Walking the “Love” labyrinth designed KZM

After discussing what materials were needed for the labyrinths (bricks for the outdoor labyrinth and paint for the indoor labyrinth) and the materials needed for the program (handouts, flowers newsprint, labyrinth photos and snacks), a budget was created.¹

Responsibilities for the two and a half hour program were identified and assigned by the student group. These included leadership of group singing focused on themes of love and peace; introductions and storytelling about labyrinth prayer; leadership of small group labyrinth walks (10-15 students each), debriefing in small groups using large newsprint on which the students could describe what they had experienced, and leadership of communal prayer.

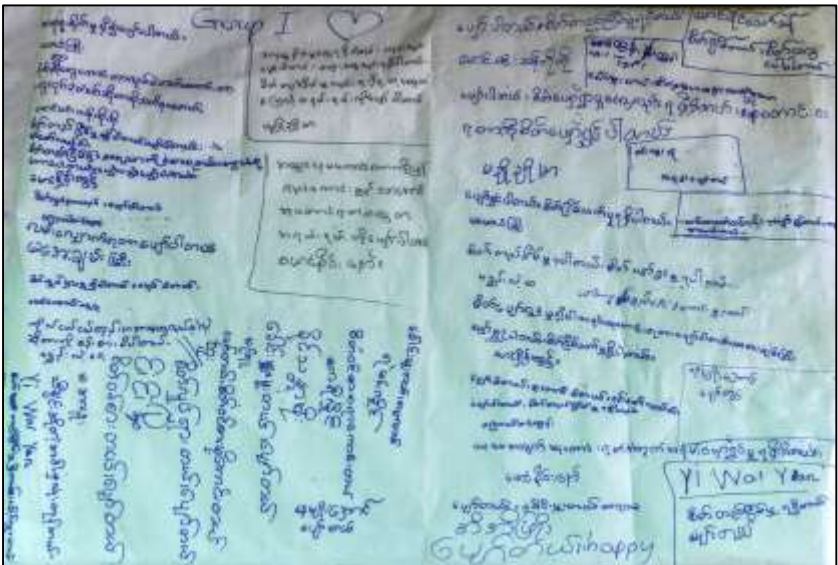


Introducing labyrinth prayer

The program was held at a Christian Community Center on a Sunday afternoon. Over 50 students participated. Youth said they had prayed for their families, to feel joy, understanding about their actions and lives, as well as personal and community challenges. The youth also identified many feelings they had experienced while using the labyrinths including stillness, dizziness, peace, focus, happiness, joy, worry, sleepiness, sorrow, warmth (heat), and excitement. In addition to walking the two labyrinths, each group also prayed with a variety of paper finger labyrinths. They reported having prayed for love, family, friends, and current issues facing the nation. Many youth asked to use the labyrinths again in the future.



Youth writing feelings experienced during the labyrinth walks



Youth responses to their labyrinth walks.

The theology students were asked to reflect on what they learned from this project. They talked about experiencing the strength that came from working as a team and depending on each other. They discussed a variety of difficulties they had faced (construction taking longer than planned, my inability to be with them because of an unexpected hospitalization, opposition from some adults who saw the labyrinths and felt afraid) and how they had come to trust in their ability to overcome obstacles to offer a meaningful ecumenical prayer event. They spoke of spiritual growth in terms of greater trust in God to help each step of the way. They wanted to note the many answered prayers for wisdom, endurance, and success in reaching the youth.

I was released from the hospital the afternoon of the labyrinth event and wasn't strong enough to attend. Here are two emails from students that I received that evening...

Hi Dr. Jill,

We all finished up our project well. By the grace of God the [youth] all were joyful and happy to do the activities. They [were] also very interested in it. We take 2 and half hour for this program with about 50 children and some adults as well. We [the graduate students] feel joy for this labyrinth program because we got chance to pray with the youth, and to share with them on labyrinth prayer experience.

With love and thanks, BHG and group.

Dear Dr. Jill,

We were very excited to offer a labyrinth project. Fifty youth attended. We shared with them about Heart Labyrinth and Tree Labyrinth. The children were very interested. We led them praying, and guided them about how to use the labyrinth. They prayed deeply, each to their God, and then we asked, "How do you feel during labyrinth prayer?" Then they were writing their feelings on a wall-paper. Some of them said - the sun is hot, some of them were happy, some of them said they enjoyed the experience. Some of them used it for playing and making friendship with each other.

I am not afraid to build more labyrinths because now I have lot of experience from your teaching and my practice, especially through our project.

KZM



Labyrinth builders

In the course syllabus I described the purpose of the final project in this way, “Final projects will be chosen to demonstrate the student’s integration of theory and practice.” It will come as no surprise that these students received the highest mark possible. I have no doubt that they will build other labyrinths and teach many about labyrinth prayer in the years to come.

Jill Geoffrion, Minnesota, USA

Note:

1. Thanks to the labyrinth enthusiasts around the globe who supported this project through Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries (www.FHLGM.org). The total budget was 16550 kyats, about \$170.00.

Author Note: Jill spends four months a year in Myanmar, building labyrinths and offering labyrinth programming. She is firmly committed to teaching others to build labyrinths so that their gifts can be shared as widely as possible. For more information about Jill’s labyrinth work and other ministries see: www.jillgeoffrion.com and www.throughjillseyes.wordpress.com