

History of the Labyrinth

For thousands of years people have constructed labyrinths, or sacred paths, as models of their life journey. The earliest labyrinth was first documented on a clay tablet from Pylos, Greece and dated to circa 1200 B.C.E.. The earliest Christian labyrinth dates back to the 4th century, in a basilica in Algeria. The construction of the Gothic cathedrals in the middle ages witnessed resurgence of labyrinths, used as models for, and in place of, religious pilgrimage. For many, it served as a symbolic pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The most known labyrinth of that time is the one laid into the cathedral floor of Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France in 1201. Many still make a pilgrimage to that cathedral labyrinth.

Corpus Christi's labyrinth is based on and is a variation of the Chartres pattern. The size is a bit larger to allow wider paths to provide space for passing. The center is larger to allow more space to pause and reflect in the center. We do not have the "petals" of the rosette or the lunations around the outer circle. Otherwise, it is the same pattern of paths and turns.

"A lamp to my feet is your word, a light to my path." (Ps. 119:105)



Dr. Lauren Artress, creator of the Labyrinth Project and Verditas at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, speaks of the process of walking the labyrinth this way:

"Walking the labyrinth is a spiritual discipline that invites us to trust the path, to surrender to the many turns our lives take, and to walk through the confusion, the fear, the anger, the grief, that we cannot avoid experiencing as we live our earthly lives. The labyrinth is a place where we can open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. We can ask for guidance and pray for ourselves and our loved ones. It calms the confused mind and the chaotic, fearful heart. It allows us to release all that is in our way of relating to the Divine: our hard-heartedness, our judgments, our impatience. The healing power of gratitude often visits the heart."

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Welcome To The Desert Labyrinth of

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A Holy Walk With God

Walking an Ancient Prayer Path

Suggestions for Walking the Labyrinth

Do not confuse a Labyrinth with a maze. Unlike the maze, a Labyrinth has no dead ends. A maze is constructed with the purpose of confusing and losing the way. There are no trick or puzzles to solve in the Labyrinth. The path in, is the path out. It is made to find your way—not to lose it.

Our lives are a journey—a sacred journey, where we encounter joy, sorrow, growth, defeat & celebration. We are challenged and transformed by these experiences. Symbolic of this, the Labyrinth is a meditation tool, a prayer tool to help us focus and experience the presence of the sacred in our ever changing lives.

There is no right or wrong way to walk the Labyrinth. **Leave your expectations behind.** Don't worry about others walking. The path is a two way street where you will meet others as you travel at different paces. Walk around them—do what feels natural—be courteous. As our life journey goes, so does the Labyrinth. We think we are approaching the center or the end and then we turn and discover we are on the outer edge once more. Relax. Try not to be self-conscious. Do what feels comfortable. Stop, pray and reflect. The walk may take you 20 minutes or over an hour.

Use a mantra or breath prayer:

† Thank you Lord.

† Give me a forgiving heart.

† Be my light, Lord.

A Threefold Spiritual Path:

- **Purgation (Releasing)** — As you walk in — this is a time to quiet your mind. Let go of the details of your life — shed your thoughts and distractions, release old injuries, fears or defeats, open your heart trusting in God's guidance. "You show me the path of life" (Ps. 16:11)
- **Illumination (Receiving)** — When you reach the center, stay as long as you like. Quiet your mind and listen. Meditate and pray. Receive what is there for you to receive. "Only in God is my soul at rest; from him comes my salvation." (Ps 62:-2)
- **Union (Returning)** — As you leave, follow the same path out of the center as you entered. You are entering the third stage, where you are joined with God at work in the world. You discover the empowerment to find what your soul is searching for. "This is what God wants of you, to do justice, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

As you walk back allow what you have experienced to touch you—listen. Before you leave the Labyrinth—look back at the center—give thanks and reverence as you may choose to bow or say Amen. Find a place to sit and reflect upon your experience. Or, you may use the bench in the center for reflection before your journey back out.

There are many ways to walk the labyrinth, ways unique as each person who comes to walk:

Gracious Attention: Quiet your mind. Release thoughts and let the gracious energy flow. Do not analyze, question or try to understand. Gently be with your feelings and sensations.

Ask a Question: Focus on a question. Walk with a listening heart. St. Benedict tells us to "listen with the ear of our heart".

Read Scripture or Spiritual Text: Slowly and meditatively read from these writings as you walk.

Engage in Prayer as You Walk: Bring to mind persons or intentions you wish to offer to God. Or name gifts, people, experiences you wish to give thanks for. Recite your favorite prayer or just talk to God.

A Labyrinth Is...

† **A winding path** that leads us to the center and back out again on the same path.

† **A powerful ancient circle** and spiral that represents unity, transformation and wholeness.

† **A wondrous path** that sometimes becomes a mirror of our own life and metaphor for our spiritual path. It reflects the many twists and turns of life.

† **A tool for spiritual growth**, transformation and healing of our body, mind, heart and spirit.

† **A tool to create spiritual discipline** for setting one foot in front of the other on our path.

† **A tool that becomes a vessel** that touches us.