

## SO WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?

Labyrinths differ from mazes though the two are often confused. A labyrinth is a spiral walking course having a single, winding, unobstructed path from the outside to the center. Unlike a maze that can be confusing, trick the mind and disorienting, a labyrinth calms the mind and relaxes the body. Labyrinths have been used by many cultures throughout history. Some believe it is a path that represents “the walk” that we take through life; many twists and turns but no dead ends.

When walking a labyrinth with others, a “mirror” is often held up before you; it reflects back to you the behaviors and personality characteristics that you express in everyday life. We are always meeting people along our “path” through life, and therefore, how we behave and think in these situations is re-created while walking a labyrinth with others. It is therefore, on one level, an opportunity to learn about yourself, and then choose to make those personal changes that can lead to having improved relationships, higher creativity and overall happiness.

On another level, the labyrinth is a powerful tool to help your mind and body relax. Recent research indicates that labyrinths have a positive effect on brainwave activity and neurological response. Therefore, the chance to release both mental and physical tension by walking a labyrinth is there for each individual. In addition, those people who find it difficult to sit still and meditate, will find the perfect outlet in the walking meditation that is the labyrinth experience. It is simultaneously kinesthetic and introspective, a complete mind-body integrative activity.

On still another level, a labyrinth can be a mind-focusing tool to enhance one’s prayer life. For those of you who feel closer to God when walking or pacing, you probably will find a similar type of heightened connection when walking through a labyrinth.

Finally, people have used labyrinths as oracles; places to receive answers to life’s troubling questions. The Reverend, Doctor Lauren Artress, an Episcopalian Priest and one of the pioneers in bringing the labyrinth back into the mainstream, believes the labyrinth to be “A watering hole for the spirit.” In other words, it is a place to receive proper “nourishment” for the spirit within; a situation not readily available in our normal day to day existence. It is also a tool that bridges the ever-widening gap between traditional religious ritual and new age spiritual practices.

### Suggestions For Using A Labyrinth

(for a walking labyrinth or finger labyrinth)

- I. Pause at the entrance and choose to enter the labyrinth; breathe smoothly. As you make your way to the center, you may opt for one of the following activities:
  - a. Allow your mind to quiet
  - b. Pray for yourself or someone else
  - c. Keep a question in mind, and make the question feel “real” by tying your emotions into it.
- II. Within the center, release from your mind and heart any prayer, concern or question (that you posed on the inward journey), and give it to your Deity of choice to handle.
- III. When you are ready to leave the center or feel “complete” with the experience, retrace the path from the center back out.
- IV. Upon leaving the labyrinth, be thankful and grateful for the opportunity to bring this divine strength and wisdom back into your daily life to enrich, enliven and strengthen you.