

THE LABYRINTH

The labyrinth, like written prayers, rosaries, icons, or candles, is a prayer tool that is intended to draw us deeper into the grace, mercy, and peace of God which passes all understanding. Specifically, labyrinths are a prayer tool that leads us into a form of contemplative prayer.

Archeologists have discovered labyrinths dating back to 1200 BC, but they were likely used well before then; we just haven't found physical evidence dating back further. Of course, at that point in history, it was not Jews or Christians constructing them. Ancient labyrinths were built to honor deities and it is not clear how exactly they were used. However, just because they do not have their roots in Christianity does not mean that labyrinths cannot be properly used by Christians, as it is God who made all things in heaven and earth. The first evidence we have of Christians using the labyrinth dates back to the 300s in Algeria and the famous labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France dates to the 1200s. By this time, the standard pattern for labyrinths seems to be in place, which includes a weaving back and forth pattern through four quadrants on the way to the center. It is believed that this labyrinth was used so that church members could symbolically join others who were on physical pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In fact, medieval labyrinths were sometimes called "Road to Jerusalem." Since the 1990s, there has been a resurgence in the interest and use of labyrinths, with hundreds being constructed recently.

This idea of the journey is at the heart of how we understand and pray with the labyrinth. Though we might think of the maze-like labyrinth from the story of the mythological Minotaur on the island of Crete, prayer labyrinths are not a maze. There is a clear path in, which is the same path out. Labyrinths are not puzzles to solve, nor are they mazes to get lost in, rather labyrinths help to be found.

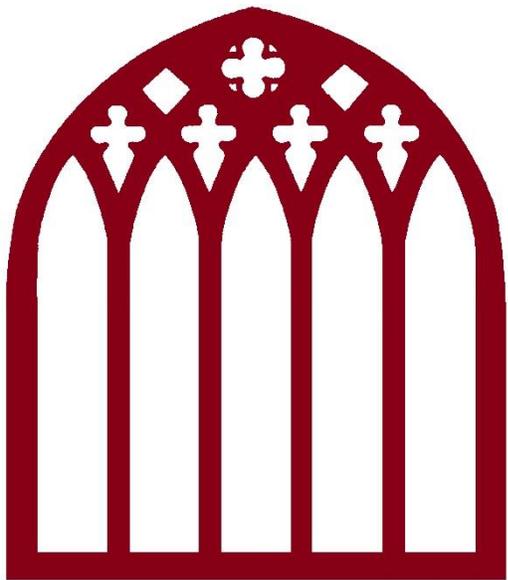
There are five phases to praying with the labyrinth:

- ④ *First:* Preparation. Spend some time preparing for your time in the labyrinth. What brings you the labyrinth? Are you praying as a means of devotion and are wanting to foster and awareness of God's presence with you? Are you trying to open yourself in a spirit of discernment to hear what God is speaking to you? Are you praying for healing? Or are you unsure of how to pray altogether and want the labyrinth to simply be a tool to quiet your mind? The labyrinth can help us in praying for many different reasons.
- ④ *Second:* The journey inward. Once you have a sense of what brings you to labyrinth, slowly begin walking it. The labyrinth is not a race, so take your time. If others are also walking the labyrinth, allow each other to pass if the space is narrow, but avoid conversation as that might disrupt their contemplative experience. You might focus on slowing your breathing and take a step with each breath. Some people find it helpful to have a short phrase or verse from Scripture that you repeat as you walk. Such phrases could be things like: Breathe on me, breath of God; Come, Holy Ghost; Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me; or the *Agnus Dei*. You might also listen to meditative music with earphones on the walk. Labyrinths can also

be used as a reflective tool, so on the inward journey, you might reflect on and pray about something that is troubling or concerning you. The journey inward is about going deep, about reflecting, and about quieting our minds from the many distractions of life.

- *Third:* The center. When you arrive at the center, the only thing to do is to be. You might close your eyes and focus on your breath to help in this. Listen for what God might be saying to you. The center is a place of encountering God and being held in the tender love of God. As you conclude your time in the center, which can last anywhere from a minute to many minutes, you might choose to close with a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer.
- *Fourth:* The journey outward. Again, slowly follow the path outward from the center. It is no accident that your route is the same that brought you to the center. The clarity and peace that you have gained at the center might help you to reinterpret your inward journey. As you walk, you might give God thanks for the wisdom and peace given to you at the center and you can also reflect on how this experience has transformed you and what wisdom you desire to hold onto.
- *Fifth:* As you exit the labyrinth, you can turn to face the center and either bow, make the sign of the Cross, say "Amen," or some combination of those. The labyrinth is prayer, and so we conclude by acknowledging the holiness of the experience we have just had. The more you use this prayer tool, the more comfortable you will be with it. The labyrinth has persisted for thousands of years because it is a prayer form that bears much fruit.

The particular labyrinth that we have at St. Luke's was an Eagle Scout project by Hans Roemer and was dedicated in 2015. It is located near the intersection of Council and Jackson Streets. The labyrinth can be used anytime and without an appointment. May God bless you in your journey.



ST. LUKE'S

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the difference Christ makes

