

What is a Labyrinth?

The labyrinth is an ancient symbol found across many cultures and around the world. Labyrinths are often confused with mazes, but are actually very different.

Mazes are intended to puzzle and confuse you with many possible turns and dead ends. In contrast, a labyrinth has just one path to the center, with no decisions to make to reach the goal.

Accordingly, the journey through a maze is vastly different than a labyrinth walk. Mazes can be stressful, confusing and require concentrated thinking to successfully reach the center. However, walking a labyrinth requires simple focus on the path immediately underfoot, letting the labyrinth guide you along the single pathway to the center. Because you are not required to solve the pattern, a labyrinth walk can be meditative, relaxing, and soothing. Labyrinths are used today in churches, schools, hospitals, prisons, parks and private homes.



Walking a Path of Prayer

There are many ways to experience the labyrinth walk. The most common use of the labyrinth is as a spiritual tool, a way of silencing the noise and turmoil in our busy lives, for centering and meditative prayer. The slow, rhythmic walking, back and forth, eases the mind, and acts as a full-body prayer. *The walk will affect each person differently, and may affect one person differently each time it is done.*

If you have enjoyed other forms of meditation, or find walking helps you to think and calm down, this form of prayer may be of interest. It is a wonderful way to become centered in our lives.

✠ *Walking a labyrinth is like taking a walk with God* ✠

A Bit of Labyrinth History

Labyrinths are found in many spiritual traditions and cultures. Smaller “wall labyrinths” inscribed near the entrances of sacred places were traced with the finger to quiet the mind before entering. Labyrinth designs appeared on Cretan coins from 350 BC, on ancient pottery shards and in Neolithic tombs. The same design was found in Africa, Asia, Russia and the pre-European Americas. Over 300 stone labyrinths still exist in Scandinavia where fishermen as recently as 1900, walked them for a blessing of a good daily catch.



Labyrinths predate Christianity by over a millennium. The earliest known Christian labyrinth dates back to 324 AD. It is believed that one adaptation of labyrinths in the Christian Church was as a site of pilgrimage. Early Christians took a vow to visit the Holy City at some point in their lives. During the Middle Ages, as the Crusades made travel to Jerusalem unsafe, other means were needed to honor that sacred commitment. Labyrinths were built in the floors of the naves of designated cathedrals and may have provided a safe means to fulfill the pilgrimage vow. Christians making pilgrimages to these cathedrals would be able to complete their physical and spiritual journeys in the safety of the cathedral labyrinths. The center of the labyrinth symbolized Jerusalem for these early Christians, and walking the labyrinth became an important spiritual practice and a likely substitute for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Today 21st Century pilgrims are rediscovering labyrinth walking as a tool in their spiritual journey.

How to Walk the Labyrinth

There is no wrong way to walk a labyrinth. In fact, walking is not even required. Walk, sit, watch, skip, dance, pray or simply be in the presence of God. Some people experience profound joy, others become tearful. Some seek answers to an issue or problem, others find comfort from grief or relief from stress.

One widely used process involves three phases:

- ✿ Journey in - following the path to the center,
- ✿ Being in the center, and
- ✿ Journey out - retracing the same path out.

The “journey in” phase can be a shedding of distractions, releasing your thoughts. The center may be a place to receive or be with God. Stay as long as you like. The “journey out” is a transition, a gradual return to daily life, back out the same pathway.

Walk with an open mind and an open heart. You may walk with a prayer, a concern or a problem you wish to lift up to God. You may wish to pause as you enter or exit, or walk around the perimeter to prepare or reflect.

Move at your own pace. While walking with others, you may momentarily step off the path when meeting or passing. Keep in mind that some walkers may be on their way out while others are walking in along the same path. Accordingly, you may meet persons who are going the opposite direction. Do not let this confuse you.

It is important to remember, though, that your labyrinth walk is as individual as you are. If you do not feel compelled to follow the 3-phase walk, you needn't do so. You may walk directly in to the center or out across the path lines. The only “rules” involve respect for the labyrinth and respect for others on the path.

♥ *Follow your heart* ♥



Lisa Gidlow Moriarty is a creative designer, consultant and maker of labyrinths. She holds a Bachelors in Fine Art/Design, and designs labyrinths for both indoor and outdoor use, with a variety of materials. Her unique designs include the Circle of Peace™ and Dancing Woman™ labyrinths.

Lisa is VP and Midwest Regional Representative of international Labyrinth Society. (www.labyrinthsociety.org)

Lisa is also a Certified Labyrinth Facilitator through Veriditas World-Wide Labyrinth Project and is available for labyrinth presentations, workshops and retreats as well as design consultation, labyrinth creation, rentals and products.

Interested persons are invited to experience her twelve outdoor labyrinths in Stillwater, MN, by appointment. Contact Lisa by telephone at 612-747-7446, by email at Labyrinthlady@gmail.com or visit her website at www.pathsofpeace.com.

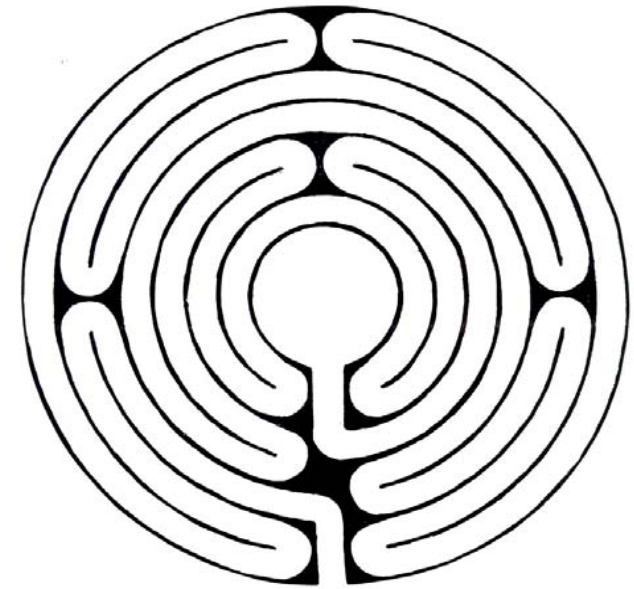
∞ Blessings on your journey ∞

The Church of St. Patrick of Edina has a 45 foot round 7 circuit concentric outdoor labyrinth designed by Lisa. It is located in an amphitheater on the south side of the church structure. Parking is available and access to the labyrinth is in St. Patrick's west parking lot off Gleason Road.



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The Labyrinth



Joyful Journey
Paths of Peace