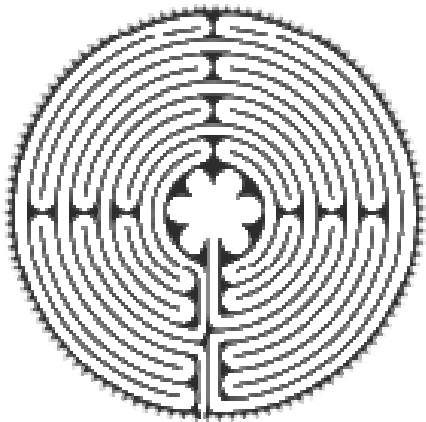


The LABYRINTH



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Walking the Ancient Path

Presented by:

Community Interfaith Celebration

in conjunction with

The United Churches of Olympia

History and Background

The labyrinth is an ancient symbol found in many cultures. Unlike a maze, it consists of a singular path, not many, and therefore, one cannot get lost. In the many cultures where labyrinths are found, they are often used as spiritual journeys, sometimes as a walking meditation, and sometimes to ask a question. Walkers contemplate the question going in, wait for an answer in the center, and contemplate the answer coming out.

This particular labyrinth is a copy of the labyrinth found at the gothic cathedral Notre Dame de Chartres in France, laid down when the cathedral was built in the late 1100's. For medieval people, to walk the labyrinth was the spiritual equivalent of a journey to Jerusalem. Because of the crusades, many people were prevented from making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In lieu of traveling so far, many went on pilgrimages to closer places. Some went to the great cathedrals, visiting the relics brought back from the holy land. In the seven cathedrals in France where the Pope allowed labyrinths to be created, people walked them.

Rose Design

Walking the labyrinth, then, was their pilgrimage - to the rose in the center, symbol of the holy mother of God. Like Jesus, they would go back to the source, and then would be "reborn" upon return to the outside. To our modern eyes and thought, this seems almost too odd or mystical, but most Christian denominations originate in Catholicism, which had a rich tradition of mysticism until the late middle ages.

Sacred Geometry and Numerology

Labyrinths laid out in the original tradition are created using numerological principles and sacred geometry, as a reflection of "God as the perfect mathematician," as He was seen in the medieval tradition of Christianity. The many native traditions that create them have much the same idea, that the world was created on numerological and astrological principles. To create labyrinths using these principles is but to honor the great creator.

The labyrinth at Chartres (and our labyrinth) is constructed from a 13 pointed star which sets out the inner rose petals. Thirteen is now seen to be unlucky, but at the time, the number representative of Jesus and twelve disciples was seen to be very good, and is still reflected in our judge and jury of 12. There are six rose petals, a number indicative of balance and law, and six is the first "perfect" number, whereby its factors both multiply and add up to itself ($1 \times 2 \times 3 = 6$, $1 + 2 + 3 = 6$). There are 11 circuits to the complete 12th inner space, 6 quarter turns, and 28 full turns, 28 being the second perfect number. Ringing the circle are 4×28 half lunar shapes, of which both the shapes and numbers reflect the astrological importance of the lunar cycle. The entrance of our labyrinth faces true south, so that one enters the labyrinth in the direction assigned to the heart, and to the "New Jerusalem," and then returns to the north, symbol of the world.

While numerology, sacred geometry and astrology are not generally part of modern thought and sometimes seem frightening because of their "cultic" associations, in the middle ages, they were the sciences and math that the monks and master masons studied and used to build all sacred spaces. It is in that spirit that this labyrinth was created.

Walking the Labyrinth

When people walk the labyrinth, they may have a variety of reasons for doing so, may expect different things, and experience a variety of responses. Often people walk to ask a specific question, or to create a spiritual space, or to open their hearts.

The labyrinth for most brings forth life metaphors. A walker first entering may seem very close to the center but soon realizes it takes much longer to get there. The center presents itself just when it seems farthest. Sharing the space with others can be a spiritual connection - passing one another, drifting away, walking in parallel only to turn away and then again towards.

Over the centuries, people have had different and similar reactions to the space. It contains seeds of the mystery lacking today and gives us a taste of ancient ritual.

The labyrinth was laid down by members of the Community for Interfaith Celebration and is a gift to The United Churches community for all to enjoy and use in contemplation. May your spirit grow as you do so.

—Janet F. Ott, Ph. D.

Coordinator of the C.I.C. Labyrinth Project