

SACRED RHYTHMS | walking the labyrinth

Materials: None for the practice, a journal may be helpful to capture your experience afterwards

Brief Description:

One form of prayer walking uses an ancient tool called the labyrinth. Hundreds of years ago, when people could not make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to visit that holy city, cathedrals began to lay floors with different forms of labyrinths. People could go to the cathedrals and make a spiritual journey by walking the labyrinth. Today you can find them all over and in various forms.

All labyrinths have a few things in common. There is always only one path that winds in a circuitous way to the center. You cannot get lost, because it is not a maze and the whole path is always visible so you can be internally quiet. You use the same path to return. The entrance becomes the exit. It is a path of prayer.

In Chelmsford, First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church (2 Westford St) has a labyrinth that we are invited to use for this. To access the labyrinth, you will park in the parking lot just behind the church, and walk around to the right side of the building. The labyrinth is a permanent installation out of stone pavers on the ground on the west side of the church.

You can also find small finger labyrinths or printable labyrinths that allow you to practice the labyrinth without needing to be at the large walking labyrinth.

This guided practice of walking the labyrinth was provided by Dean Deb Auguer, North Park Theological Seminary

Doing the Practice:

Typically there are three stages to the walk: **releasing** something to God on the way in; **receiving** something from God in the center; **returning** – taking back to the world what you have received in the center.

There is no “right” way to pray through a labyrinth. Listen to the Spirit and walk in step with whatever God may be calling you to at this moment. Sometimes walking the path with my intention to be with God is enough to calm me and remind me to whom I belong and who I am. Sometimes I am given a ‘word’ from God. Other times I have had breakthroughs that open me to new possibilities and direction and healing. Sometimes it is just a nice, quiet walk with Jesus – no words, just presence.

Sometimes we walk into a labyrinth with a question, holding it with an open heart as we walk toward the center. Once at the center we may wait until we sense an answer from God. Then, in gratitude, we take our answer out with us and back to our lives in the world.

Some labyrinth experts invite walkers to open their minds to every metaphor that comes their way as they proceed through the path to the center. If you experience some strong metaphors receive them with gratitude as a gift from the Lord.

Walking at the same time as others invites even more possibility and metaphor. Take it in and allow the richness of community to deepen the experience.

When walking with others: Allow a few minutes for the walker in front of you to get well on her way. If you are walking more slowly than someone behind you, simply let them pass at one of the turns and then

continue on. If you are on your way out of the labyrinth you will most likely pass others on their way in. The ones leaving make way for those coming in.

When anyone on the labyrinth is at the center, the others pause their journey and silently hold the person in the center up to God. Once the person leaves the center, the others may continue on their journey.

Reflecting On The Labyrinth:

When your labyrinth experience is over, it is very helpful to spend some time capturing your experience in your journal. What did you hear in the quiet of your soul? What did you receive from God on your journey? How are you changed?