



SCHOOL FOR

Contemplation & Discipleship

Field Guide: *Walking the Labyrinth*

A labyrinth is an ancient design, which has been found in all religious traditions in various forms. Its history spans the globe as well as thousands of years. The Christian labyrinth was first developed around the fourth century and is believed to have provided a “pilgrimage” experience for those unable to make the dangerous and expensive trip to Jerusalem. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth offers no tricks, puzzles or dead-ends. The design forms a winding unicursal path which leads toward the center and back out again. This sacred path in a sacred circle simply leads to a deeper connection to God.

Labyrinth Guidelines

- **Perhaps the most important guideline is that there is no correct way to experience a labyrinth.** Sometimes you will move slowly, at other times more quickly. You may feel drawn to pause frequently or your journey may be smooth and continuous. If moved to dance or kneel or move in some other way - notice this invitation - and maybe give it a try.
- *Remember, if journeying the labyrinth with others, that the path is a two-way street where everyone is moving at a different pace. Be mindful of your companions and make space for one another as needed.*
- **You do not have to physically walk the labyrinth.** Paper labyrinths and handheld labyrinths can be a different way to approach this sacred symbol - give it a try!
- **The labyrinth is a container for metaphor.** Be open to whatever arises - images, ideas, people, etc. and notice with curiosity what the Holy Spirit might be saying to you in this unique form of prayer.
- **Here are 3 stages of engaging a labyrinth that can help structure the practice and make the experience meaningful:**
 1. **On the journey inward:** Releasing - letting go, quieting, shedding
 2. **While in the center:** Receiving - listening, opening, being present
 3. **On the journey outward:** Returning - reflecting, resolving, reclaiming, integrate
- **Consider combining the labyrinth with other spiritual practices to bring new dimensions to those practices:**
 - a. rosary/prayer beads
 - b. praying the Daily Office
 - c. centering prayer
 - d. breath meditation
 - e. ponder a question/decision
 - f. create a ritual to honor an event, a person, etc.
- **After your labyrinth experience, be sure to take some time for reflection.** Journaling, drawing, coloring, discussion with a friend/spiritual director, sitting quietly in Centering Prayer, and other reflective practices can be a helpful way to absorb and process the experience.

The Heart of the Practice

The labyrinth is a tool for prayer, a traveling meditation. This is a personal tool, just one among many used for contemplation. As with any other tool, continued practice produces more and more comfort with its manner of “speaking” to our lives. Using everything that occurs on the journey as a metaphor, the labyrinth becomes an effective mirror for life, a reflecting pool of sorts.