

The Labyrinth



Myers Park Baptist Church

The History of the Labyrinth

The rediscovery of the medieval labyrinth, a twelfth century mystical tool, is one of the most important spiritual developments of our day. Throughout human history, pilgrimage – the search for the holy – has been a recurrent movement. The Hebrew scriptures frequently represent God’s people journeying to a land of Promise, to Zion, to sacred places. The Psalms also bear witness to this yearning deep within the heart of the Covenant people. The first Christians were called “people of the Way” and they willingly followed the path Jesus set before them.

In the Middle Ages, Christians were expected to travel to the Holy Land at least once during their lives. As travel became more dangerous during the Crusades, certain cathedrals throughout Europe were designated as “pilgrimage cathedrals.” Christians would travel to those sites where they would walk a labyrinth laid in the cathedral’s stone floor. This is why these labyrinths were sometimes called “New Jerusalems.”

These early pilgrims walked the labyrinth as we do today: as a metaphor of our life’s journey. Today labyrinths are being used in churches, in hospitals, in retirement centers, in parks, in prisons, and in retreat and conference centers. The labyrinth appeals to all ages from young children to senior citizens.

Walking the Labyrinth

The labyrinth walk is different each time one walks it. Often people find peace, solace, release, and a deep

sense of joy. When walked with a community of people, the walk is a shared journey, an activity which groups do together to coalesce and unify vision.

The labyrinth has a single path into and out of the center. Start your walk by removing your shoes, if you wish. Then clear your mind and become aware of your breath. You may want to say a prayer before you move to the entrance. As you start to walk, find your own pace. There is no need to rush. Some people will walk faster, others more slowly. An average walk takes 20 to 30 minutes.

Because the labyrinth is a two-way street, you may “pass” people or let others step around you, whichever is easiest. Those going in will meet those going out. Do what feels natural.

While everyone approaches the labyrinth differently and leaves with different experiences, the labyrinth walk is often seen as having three movements:

Moving Inward	A time to cast off, discard, divest, unwrap, forget;
Centering	A time to be open, expectant, empty and receptive;
Moving Outward	A time to gain direction, comfort and new energy.

Others see these movements as a modern analogue to the traditional Christian pilgrimage: an approach to God, a communion with God, and then a return to the everyday. Some walk slowly, some dance, some walk many times. There is no right way or wrong way to walk the labyrinth. Simply relax and enjoy your journey.

The Labyrinth

The labyrinth here at Myers Park Baptist Church was patterned after the 14th-century labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France. Ours was designed and installed by the artist Tom Schulz, a member of the congregation. It is open to the public 24 hours a day and is well-lit at night.

What Is A Labyrinth?

The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool. The winding circuitous walk symbolizes a pilgrim’s walk with God.

The labyrinth is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in all religious traditions in various forms around the world and throughout history. The labyrinth is not a maze; there are no tricks to it and no dead ends. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror of the way we live our lives; it touches our sorrows and releases our joys. So walk it with an open heart and mind.