



Walking the Labyrinth

This resource is provided by the South Carolina Lutheran Retreat Centers. Learn more at sclrc.com!

A labyrinth is a form of pilgrimage, a sort of holy wandering that draws us close to God.

Historically, labyrinths were provided as a way for those who could not afford or safely travel to Jerusalem to take a symbolic pilgrimage. The spiritual journey reflected the physical journey, and the physical journey reflected the spiritual journey.

The church, in her wisdom, recognized the analogies to our Christian life, and continues to use labyrinths for prayer and spiritual growth.

A labyrinth is different from a maze. Mazes have multiple choices and dead ends. The only choice with a labyrinth is to enter or not. Labyrinths are one path that winds in and out to a center. Some people reflect on a question or prayer prompt going into the labyrinth, spend time in the center for prayer, reflection and meditation, and reflect on another question going out.

There are many ways to walk the labyrinth. Like other travels, you may meet people on the way. You may be changed by your experience. The way out seems different than the way in. You might keep your head down, or you might be drawn to look up or out. You might be singing, speaking, dancing, or just focusing on your breath. You might do this on your own in a private moment or with a large group. You might be drawn to joy, delighting in the beauty of the trees and the wonder of God's creation. You might feel sadness, and know the despair of sin and brokenness. Whatever you bring to the labyrinth, invite God into it with you.

The labyrinth is open for prayer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, providing an accessible gift to the whole community. It can be approached on a variety of levels. Children enjoy it. The kinesthetic movement is welcome good news to those who think praying has to be boring and requires sitting still. The public outdoor setting brings a new dimension to our prayers as well; as the wind blows through the trees, the Holy Spirit might move in your heart. Walking brings stress relief to our minds and oxygen to our brains.

Labyrinths can be a variety of shapes and sizes. This one has been designed specifically for this outdoor setting. Notice the beauty of God's creation around you. This is holy ground. We are glad to share it. All are welcome.

God's peace be with you.

Here are a variety of models for walking you may wish to try:

Purgation: releasing and shedding as you walk towards the center.

- What do you need to let go of?

Illumination: resting in the center to receive inspiration

- What do you need to hear?

Union: returning to your life with a new awareness.

- What do you need to do now?

1. Preparation- Take a deep breath and inspect your expectations.
2. Invocation- Call on God's name in prayer.
3. Going in- Intentionally notice your acceptance of this journey.
4. Staying in the center- Spend time where you are.
5. Returning to the world- Go out with purpose, calling, mission and ministry.
6. Thanksgiving- Thank God.
7. Reflection- So what? Now what? How will you live?

* Going in, think of a habit you want to let go. Going out, think of a habit you want to pick up.

* Going in, pray the words, Cleanse me, O God. Going out, pray the words, Fill me, O God.

* Pay attention to what you notice. Are you staring at your feet? The lines? Other people? Are you thinking, "when is it over? Why can't I do this right? This is a waste of time. OR This is comfortable. I never want it to end." Pay attention to your own unique response and contemplate what that has to do with how you regard prayer/worship/intimacy with Go

* Contemplate the relationship between prayer and service. How does worshipping God send us back into the world?

* It is much easier to drink water out of a container, such as a glass. The glass is only the aid, not the water, but it makes the water readily available. As with a glass, the labyrinth is a container. Drinking the water, taking the journey, or eating the meal is up to us. Reflect on ways the church, scripture, traditional disciplines of the church are tools to draw us closer to God, but are not gods themselves. What tools are most helpful for you? When they are not in your life, what do you notice is missing?

* As you walk, think about others who walk, athletes, refugees, inter-faith pilgrims, women going to find water. Where is there separation and isolation in our lives? How do we walk as one people?

* We are surrounded by noise in our lives. What do you not hear? What do you hear?

* Consider your own personal journey. Where have you been? Where will you go?

* Pay attention to your physical body. Contemplate ways you betray and hurt your body, and ways you faithfully steward the temple of the Holy Spirit, your body. How does this relate to the body of Christ, one holy catholic and apostolic church?

* Notice the natural world around you, puddles, acorns, trees, weather. Confess ways in which you contribute to the destruction of creation. Consider how you can be a good steward of creation.

* Don't purposely think of *anything*; just see what emerges. Just listen.