

A History of Labyrinths

People have been walking labyrinths for thousands of years. They have been found in many cultures, often separated from each other by great time or distance. Among other places, labyrinths have been found in Peru, Arizona, Iceland, Crete, Egypt and India. One path, known as the classical or seventh circuit is at right. This ancient and widespread design has been found in several cultures.



During the Middle Ages many were moved to experience their faith through pilgrimages. Unfortunately, travelling was costly and dangerous. In response, the church recommended travel to a cathedral. Walking the cathedral's labyrinth (sometimes on their knees) became a symbolic pilgrimage. The labyrinth in the cathedral in Chartres in France was laid down around 1200. It was similar to those in other cathedrals and has been used as the model for countless labyrinths since. This labyrinth is one of the few remaining cathedral labyrinths.



In modern times the labyrinth has gained recognition as a way exploring one's inner self. Labyrinths are used for a variety of reasons including to center oneself, meditate, ponder a concern, or pray. A walk can be a healing and profound experience, or it can just be a walk.

"You will walk in good company."
– Jane Siberry, *The Valley*

About This Labyrinth

Our world is filled with the noise and business of life. It can be hard, in the middle of all that, to find moments of peace. We can try to leave the chaos behind and go someplace else, but it is hard to bring that sense of peace back with us when we rejoin everyday life. This labyrinth does not try to be removed from life. It is in the middle of it all, beside a busy intersection filled with cars, busses, bicycles, and pedestrians. You are invited to seek peace in this space, not despite the noise, but while immersed in the noise.

During the construction of this labyrinth, the builders prayed for those who would walk it, that they may feel peace.

If the weather allows, try walking the labyrinth in bare feet. The walk becomes a different experience when you are in direct contact with the ground. This practice may help you feel a connection with the natural world and the people who have cared for this land over the years. This labyrinth was built on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Chonnonton peoples.

The Path

We hope to get where we are going fast. This labyrinth begins by walking straight towards the center, but we are diverted and find ourselves walking away from it. Centering yourself is not something that happens in a rush.

The path approaches the center more than once, but then is diverted. The focus is not on the goal, but on the path.

The final leg is the longest, and the farthest from the center. It is followed by a straight path to the middle. Often when we think we are furthest from where we are headed, we find that distance was only an illusion. We may need to rethink how we define our progress.

A Walk in Three Parts

Each walk is different, depending on who is walking and the walker's state of mind.

Going In

Release. Allow yourself to let go. Quiet your mind. Open your heart and mind to what may come.

The Centre

Receive (or contemplation). Stay in the center as long as you feel is right. Make yourself comfortable by standing, sitting or kneeling. If you choose, focus on an issue or question that concerns you.

Coming Out

Return (or emergence). Rejoin the world, bringing with you any insights that you have gathered on your walk.

This Labyrinth is a Compass

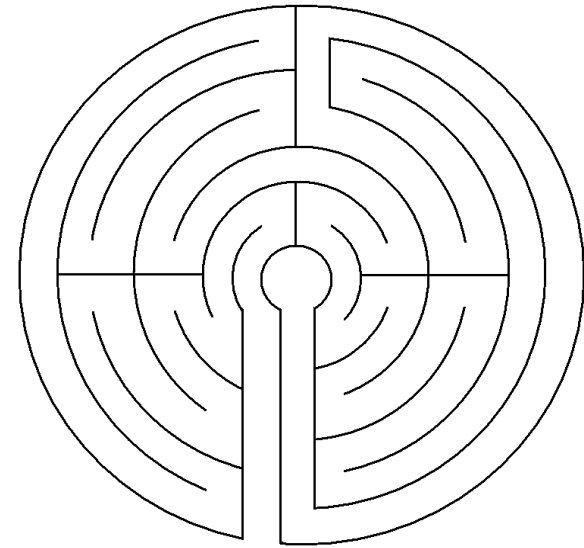
One enters this labyrinth by walking west, toward the setting sun. One can then spend a symbolic "night" in the middle, in contemplation. One emerges from the labyrinth by walking east, toward the rising sun of a new day.

The labyrinth is oriented as it is with the hope of supporting those whose practice is to pray or do other observances in a particular direction.

Walking the Labyrinth Without Walking

Those not able to physically travel the path can have a similar experience. Try tracing the path on the front of this paper with your finger or a pencil. Go from the entrance to the middle, pause, and make your way back out. Feel the texture of the paper. Take your time. Do it again.

Peace in the Middle of the Noise



Welcome to the labyrinth

Take a Moment

Breathe

St. Stephen Lutheran Church
248 Highland Road East, Kitchener, Ontario

