

Walking the Labyrinth

at Swarthmore Presbyterian Church, 727 Harvard Avenue, Swarthmore, PA 19081

"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths." - Psalm 25:4

"The best way to learn about the labyrinth is to walk a well-constructed one with an open heart and an open mind at least three times." - The Rev. Canon Lauren Artress, Grace Cathedral

Labyrinths have been around for a long, long time - more than 4,000 years. While we don't really know their origins, labyrinths seem to be divine imprints and are made of many different materials: some are carved in stone, others - Roman-style - are made of mosaics; still others found throughout England, Scandinavia, and Germany are turf labyrinths formed by mounds of earth covered with grass.

The labyrinth you are about to walk is a replica of the classical eleven-circuit, or circle, labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France. By walking this labyrinth, first laid out around 1220, you are rediscovering a long forgotten ritual used as a walking meditation and spiritual tool.

Pilgrims are said to have walked the labyrinth at Chartres if they could not make an actual pilgrimage to the Holy Land. You can also walk the labyrinth as a way to meditate, to look within, to recognize the wider patterns in life, and to work in harmony with others. The winding path becomes a mirror, a metaphor, for life's journey - with its twists and turns, slow places and fast stretches, peaks and valleys (joys and sorrows), turning points and insights.

The information on this page comes from materials about walking labyrinths at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian church, St. Stephen's Church in Philadelphia, and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

The Walk

You can think of your walk as having three parts, or stages:

First, moving toward the center (don't worry if you feel a bit wobbly at first as you try to stay on the path; you will soon find your rhythm) - this is a good time to relax, to breathe slowly and consciously, to practice letting go in order to find a quiet mind;

Second, being in the center - this can be a place of rest, meditation, prayer, and sometimes illumination - stay in the center as long as you wish;

Third, leaving the center and journeying "back home," taking with you a sense of presence, of God, and of the healing forces at work in the world.

There is no right way to walk and you cannot get lost: the path is not a maze and the way you enter is the same way by which you leave. It is a simple journey that has no prescribed time limit, a universal journey walked in the company of those who have come before and those who will come after - and yet experienced alone.

Some walkers like to reflect after walking with pen and paper.

Walking Guidelines

Maintain silence for your reflection and that of others.

Take some time before you walk to clear your mind and become aware of your breathing.

Allow yourself to find the pace your body wants to go. As you meet other walkers, gently give way to your meeting and passing.

Be aware of your process and feeling and know that you are sharing this with others. Remember, all things on your walk will instruct. Your walk is uniquely yours.

Take time after your walk to reflect and meditate. Repeat the path, if you wish, perhaps at another time of day.