

What is the Labyrinth?

It is a walking meditation.

Walking can be a spiritual exercise! Movement can be prayer! In fact, for some of us, like St Augustine, walking is the way we do contemplation, discernment, and often can best encounter the Divine.

The labyrinth is a spiritual practice that helps us use our walking for spiritual purposes.



It is old.

The labyrinth is ancient. In many of the great Christian cathedrals of Europe, labyrinths were built right into the floor tiles. The Celtic cross and knot bear similarities to the pattern. Even sacred circles of ancient civilizations resemble features of the labyrinth.

It is a tool.

The labyrinth holds no special powers. It isn't sacred alone. It is a tool for sacred experience the same way that music and artwork can help us experience something sacred. Alone, it is only an object, but put to use, like a hammer and a nail, it can achieve the purpose for which it is designed.

It is **NOT** a maze.

Keep in mind that the labyrinth isn't a puzzle to be solved, or a maze with choices to be made. The labyrinth only has one path to follow – the walker cannot get lost or confused. The journey to the center and the journey back out are clearly marked.

It is within our tradition.

The labyrinth is appropriate for Presbyterians and Christians of all traditions, as well as people of all faiths. It doesn't have doctrine – you don't have to believe a certain way to walk the labyrinth. It **DOES** allow people to bring their unique heritage and beliefs to the walking experience. We walk on the spiritual pathway with those who may be different from ourselves – an experience of unity in diversity.

It is shared.

Walking the labyrinth can be a solitary experience, but at the same time it is important to remember that you are not alone. The path is shared by others. Often you will encounter others in front, behind, alongside. And they may walk slower, faster, or linger places. It may be appropriate to greet or acknowledge with a nod or eye contact, or simply allow them to pass by.

It is an opportunity.

Walking the labyrinth is an opportunity to be attentive to God's presence in new and fresh ways. Each entry into the labyrinth can be an opportunity to encounter God anew. Allow the rhythms, movements, and silence to help you contemplate, and nourish your imagination.

It has many purposes.

The labyrinth provides a place for a variety of spiritual exercises. Christians may use labyrinth for : PRAYER – walk and allow the prayer to happen; PRESENCE – experience the union with God on your path; DISCERNMENT – you may bring a particular concern, decision, or request and seek divining guidance; METAPHOR – reflect on the labyrinth as a metaphor of life itself.

It is without judgment.

There is not a “right” way to experience the labyrinth. While these suggestions may help in your walking, they do not ensure a particular experience. Like reading and reading the Bible, each experience can have slight differences in nuance and understanding. Let the Spirit move according to God's purpose; let go of a “planned” outcome. Sometimes it may seem like nothing has happened; if so, just explore that. Trust that the Spirit has spoken even if the walk seems unexpected.

Borrowed from the materials of Grace Episcopal Church in Yorktown, VA.