

The Three-Fold Mystical Path

RELEASING (Purgation). Walking from the entrance of the labyrinth to its center represents the first part of the mystical path. It is the place to empty, release, quiet our beings, and to let go of the things that block our relationship to God.

RECEIVING (Illumination). The second stage of the three-fold path may be found at the center of the labyrinth. After we have quieted the mind and body on the labyrinth's path, the center is a place for meditation and prayer. The rose, in medieval times, symbolized the Holy Spirit. This rose has six petals; the petals represent the human, mineral, animal, vegetable, angelic, and Divine, in keeping with the medieval idea of the sacredness of all creation. If we enter the rose with an open heart and mind, we will be able to receive what is there for us.

INTEGRATING (Union). This final stage begins at the center rose and takes us back out into the world. In the mystical tradition of the Middle Ages, union meant being completely absorbed in God. This third stage of the walk "empowers the seeker to move back out into the world, replenished and directed."

In The Light Of The Rain by Bronwen Abbattista

*down to the labyrinth
maze of the mind
down steep steps
my parents helped to build
long before
I was born*

*to a clearing
among the trees
a rare flat plane
in this forest
of pine needle stashes
and pothole hammocks*

*the symmetrical lines
drawn by smooth
white stones
so stark against
the ancient evergreens*

*and as we stood
admiring the sacred pattern
sprung like a
subterranean blossom
petals reaching up to graze
the soil*

*it began to rain
a silent shower
nature's prayer
droplets fell
through the dappled sun
like the tears of angels
in cathedral windows
my heart ached with brief
sharp reference*

*the mind is placated
by soft small things*

*we walked up the hill
talking quietly
of time and change
I looked over my shoulder
and saw
from a height*

*the wide pale labyrinth
as from one
huge raindrop
spreading its delicate ripples
out and over
the waiting earth*



For more on La Foret's history and additional
information please visit our website
www.laforet.org.

Labyrinth



Spirituality • Pilgrimage • Union
Releasing • Illumination • Meditation
Integration • Receiving • Peace

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WALKING A SACRED PATH

Medieval Christians walked labyrinths as a form of pilgrimage. Today many people are finding the labyrinth offers a special enhancement to their prayer lives. A labyrinth has been created in the serene forest of La Foret for all who visit there.



What Is a Labyrinth?

The labyrinth is a feature of many medieval cathedrals, although their use in the Christian church dates to the fourth century or earlier. The labyrinth is a geometrical design portraying a winding path from a starting point to a goal. It is marked out on the floor and, unlike a maze, has only one path (so you cannot become lost!). Many Christian versions, including the Chartres labyrinth, incorporate a cross shape.

“The labyrinth is a spiritual tool meant to awaken us to the deep rhythm that unites us to ourselves and to the Light that calls from within. In surrendering to the winding path, the soul finds healing and wholeness.”

—Dr. Lauren Artress in *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool*

The tradition of pilgrimage is a part of the Christian tradition. It was an especially important part of Christian life in the Middle Ages, when a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was the one commitment essential to the spiritual life, surpassing even communion. With the crusades of the twelfth century, travel became dangerous and expensive, so the church designated seven pilgrimage cathedrals to become a symbolic Jerusalem. After spending days, even weeks traveling to one of these cathedrals, the pilgrims ended their physical journey with a walk into the labyrinth. Centuries later, the spiritual pilgrimage is recognized in the journey of faith. In place of a physical journey to Jerusalem, we are on an inner journey to God.

A contemporary individual might walk the labyrinth as an aid to contemplative prayer and reflection. As you wind your way around approaching the center, you gradually let go of the concerns of the day. You can view it as a centering exercise to help you focus on God or nature. You can also view it as an allegory of your life—sometimes appearing to be close to your focus, only to be suddenly out to the edge. Or perhaps to find yourself walking sometimes in sympathy with others and other times far distant, and so on. At the center, you meet God, nature, or another focus, and sit and rest there for as long as you like. Then you walk the labyrinth outwards, carrying the Light with you out into the world.

La Foret's Labyrinth

It was the dream of long-time La Foret patron Don Seymour to leave something special for the children and adults of La Foret, something that would give them joy in their spiritual time. The Labyrinth was created by the entire Seymour family, who planned and worked for numerous years on location and design. It was also an immense “labor of love” by life-time camper Eileen Abbattista. After seasons of measurement and placement of the markings, forty tons of river rock was donated by the Seymour family and transported to their sacred home below Blue Spruce Lodge. The labyrinth at La Foret measures 85 feet in diameter, twice the size of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France, one of the most well-known labyrinths in the world.

A Few Tips

- The path out of the labyrinth is the exact reverse of the path into the labyrinth.
- If you meet someone on the labyrinth, just step to one side and let her/him pass.
- You may stay in the center rose as long as you wish, being respectful of others
- The labyrinth is not a maze; there are no choices to make regarding the path's direction.