

# WALKING THE LABYRINTH

## *ST. BARTHOLOMEW CHURCH*

*45 Ludlow Road, Manchester, CT*



Our labyrinth is nestled at the end of the field beside the parking area, near Dale Rd. Constructed as an Eagle Scout project by Todd Henkel, this "walking meditation" was blessed and dedicated to the parish in April 2002 by Father Tom Sievel.

### WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?

The labyrinth is an ancient archetype, combining the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path that winds its way to the center. Christians have seen it as a symbol for the sacred journey toward the Divine. The labyrinth is not a maze; there are no tricks to it and no dead ends. The path is in full view, which allows a person to be quiet and to focus internally.

As a spiritual tool, the labyrinth walk can calm or clear the mind and give insight. It is described as a path of prayer, a walking meditation, a watering hole for the spirit.

### WHO CAN USE THE LABYRINTH?

People of all ages and denominations can use this path as an opportunity for reflection, meditation and an openness to God's presence and peace. Your walk can encompass a variety of attitudes, whether joyous or somber. Your walk can express thankfulness or grief. It offers to unwind you from a stressful day, while a brisk walk may energize you. You can relax.

Adults are often serious in the labyrinth, while children often run in and out in a playful manner. Children are welcome to enjoy the labyrinth, with supervision so that all may enjoy the meditative aspects of the walk.

When walking the labyrinth with others you may pass people, or others may step around you as you walk.

### "QUIET THE MIND, OPEN THE HEART"

There is no right way or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. Some approaches to a prayerful experience involve a "threefold path":

1. Releasing – from the entrance to the center is a shedding or "letting go"
2. Receiving – at the center there is illumination, clarity, "letting in" (pause awhile)
3. Integrating – on the path out we become grounded, energized by the Spirit

Other suggestions: enter with an intention and bow with thankfulness to God at the end; release all expectations; become aware of your breath; find the pace your body wants to go; after your walk you may want to sit quietly and reflect on your experience.

## HISTORY OF THE LABYRINTH

The Labyrinth pattern in various styles can be found in ancient cultures from all over the world. Some of the earliest forms are found in Greece, dating back to 2500 B.C.E. Our labyrinth is based on that classical seven-circuit labyrinth called the Cretan labyrinth, seen embossed on coins and pottery. Seven circuits refers to the seven concentric circles that lead to the center.

Early Christian labyrinths date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, a basilica in Algeria. The classical labyrinth design is found in many churches in Europe. The beautiful labyrinth inlaid into the marble floor of Chartres Cathedral in France was built around 1200, with an eleven-circuit design in four separate quadrants, the twelfth circle being a rosette in the center of the labyrinth. In early times it was walked as a pilgrimage, a substitute for an actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When used as a walk for repentance the pilgrims would walk on their knees.

## IMPRESSIONS OF A LABYRINTH WALK BY COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Things aren't always what they seem
- New perspectives at each corner, gain insights.
- Twists and turns in life
- Never ending, you end up where you started.
- Sometimes it seems like you were in the same place you had been, but you weren't.
- Never know when the last step comes...around the corner, etc. until it's upon you
- Center = life-changing
- There was no way to get lost, as long as you remember where you're headed.
- People cross our paths, come and go in our lives
- People move closer and farther away from God.
- One foot in front of the other
- Look forward, try not to look back
- The path is deceiving.
- Turns are ups and downs of life.
- Room for more than one on the path
- Some people move through the journey of life faster than others.
- The path in is the path out.
- Things sometimes take more time than you expect them to.
- People can get lost on the road of life.
- Come full circle (thoughts)
- Sharp turns dealt with rocky parts of life/situations.
- Obstacles on the path
- Be observant.
- Crossing other people's paths
- Am I still on the right path?
- Very peaceful, alone time
- Stay focused, don't let obstacles and distractions get in the way.
- There is a plan to follow.
- You think you're going to the middle and then you realize that you are the farthest away.
- Everyone is at a different point in life.
- In the beginning, you are unsure but as you go on it seems more clear
- First impression is of complexity but it's simple in reality.
- Confusion is brief yet intense.
- You choose your own pace.
- Is the goal the middle or the whole?
- Everything is connected. The beginning is the end.