



## COME AND WALK THE LABYRINTH AT NORTHBROOK

The labyrinth is a winding path that has been walked by millions of people of all ages, cultures and traditions for centuries. A fundamental approach to the labyrinth is as life's journey. Unlike a maze that confuses and challenges with tricks, decisions and dead ends, the labyrinth has one path that leads the walker into the center and back out once again. There are no wrong turns.

Walking a labyrinth can support healing, relieve stress, help in releasing grief, aid in decision making, guide us through troubled times, deepen self-knowledge, clear the mind, reduce anxiety, create a space for reconciliation and conflict resolution, bring comfort and direction, lower blood pressure, deepen self-knowledge, nourish creativity and provide respite from our busy lives. The labyrinth is a place of transformation.

For people of faith, the labyrinth is a spiritual tool that's universal, a pathway of prayer that is a sacred space for meditation and pilgrimage, nourishment for the soul, "putting feet on our prayers". It is a walking meditation and a journey of spiritual discovery for healing, wisdom and direction as we participate in the ongoing search for life's meaning. The labyrinth is sacred space.

The labyrinth is user friendly. You cannot get lost and there is no right or wrong way to walk. As Lauren Artress, who introduced the labyrinth back into our awareness, "The experience is different for everyone, because each of us brings different raw material to the labyrinth. We bring our unique hopes, dreams, history and longings of the soul." There is no right way to walk the labyrinth, the walks are as individual as each one of us and, in fact, each walk we walk will be unique, but the following suggestions may help you gain the most of your experience.

- Listen to your heart and take all the time you need. Enter the labyrinth with an open mind, with no preset expectations for your walk.
- Find your own rhythm and speed, whatever comes naturally or feels right for you.
- You will encounter others along the way as the path is unicursal with one way in and the same way out. Feel free to pass others if they have stopped or are walking at a slower pace. This is easiest to do on the turns.
- Generally folks do not speak to others as they walk, respecting their walk.
- You may feel drawn to a place on the labyrinth and stop there for awhile. When you reach the center stay as long as you wish in this place of rest and reflection. Pay attention to your experience and be open to all things.
- If you are disturbed by unwanted intrusions in your mind, noises such as cars or an ambulance siren or even children playing, recognize them, release them, refocus on your walk. This is part of the meditation process. It's all part of the metaphor; how is the divine available in the midst of the business of life, the distractions of the world?
- Be open to your body expressing itself through gestures, movements, or the flow of tears. Don't be trapped by the thought, "I can't do that, other people are watching!"; other people are busy with their own labyrinth experience.

## Here are suggested steps for walking the labyrinth.

### The five “Rs”

#### 1. Rest

Take time to center yourself before entering the labyrinth. Centering may include a mental prayer (Come Holy Spirit, Come), setting a specific intention for this walk, just being quiet or even journaling. Become aware of your breath. Preparation for walking is helpful as you quiet your mind and focus your thoughts. Some travelers begin and end their walk by bowing, taking a deep breath or holding their hands in a prayer position, saying a quiet “Amen,” or some other gesture that expresses humility, gratitude or openness. Experience your experience, the turns in your life. Be receptive to all things on your labyrinth walk.

#### 2. Release

- As Lauren Artress suggests, “We release the baggage that holds us captive and wears us down.”
- You may wish to focus on a specific concern, pray for others, repeat a simple prayer phrase, identify a question to think about as you walk. Sometimes it’s enough to just focus on walking, putting one foot in front of the other. Walking to the center is a time to release your problems, your anger, your worries and concerns. As you become aware of these things, pause and release them, then move forward letting go of these distractions.

#### 3. Receive

- The center of the labyrinth is a place of illumination, meditation and prayer. Listen, consider and rest. Open yourself to the Spirit. Pause; stay as long as you wish. Experience peacefulness. Allow yourself to receive what this unique moment offers. Remain open to the unexpected! Some stay awhile here while others take just a momentary pause and move back onto the path.
- In the center, the resting place, you can listen for the still voice of God deep within you.

#### 4. Return

- The outward journey is about re-connecting with the world. You choose when you will leave the center, leaving by the same path you walked in.
- Rest in the knowledge of God’s unconditional love.
- Walking the path back out of the labyrinth is a time for deep reflection and a chance to consider what it might mean for your daily living.
- When you encounter any of the burdens you previously released, you might want to pause. Intentionally choose to leave them or perhaps to pick them up. If you pick them up, you might relate to them in a new way, changed by the meditation experience and informed by what you have received while in the center.
- As you leave the labyrinth, turn and face the center, acknowledge the ending of your walk...pause to give thanks, bow, say “amen” ...whatever feels right to you, and step back into the realities of your life and the world beyond.

**5. Remember** After walking the labyrinth find a quiet place to sit and **reflect** back on your experience. You might try journaling or drawing to capture your walk. Journaling each walk can be very useful to deepen the experience. Your labyrinth experience may be profound or simply peaceful. Walk often.

**Our hope is that you will leave with renewed vision and a refreshed spirit.**

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