



## How to Walk the Labyrinth A Guide for Your Spiritual Journey



## Thank You...

Thank you for visiting the Labyrinth and Prayer Gardens at Indian Heights United Methodist Church. You are welcome at any time. Please keep in mind that our labyrinth is an extension of our church. It is a sacred site. We ask that you treat it with reverent respect and leave it in the same pristine condition as you found it.

This brochure was created to provide you with information on how to walk the labyrinth. It is a journey of faith. We hope that you find it helpful, and that it increases your labyrinth experience. Welcome to our labyrinth. It was created for you.

Grace and Peace,

The Members of Indian Heights United Methodist Church  
10211 Nall Avenue, Overland Park, KS, 66207

## What is a Labyrinth?

Many people confuse labyrinths with mazes. But a labyrinth is different from a maze. A maze is a multi-entrance, multi-path puzzle with numerous dead ends meant to confuse and challenge the mind. A labyrinth is a single entrance, single path circuit that leads to a center and is meant to quiet the mind. Since the destination is assured, with no obstacles to overcome, what remains is the deeply meditative and purposeful discipline of setting one foot in front of another. As one labyrinth walker put it, "You walk out the same way you walk in, but you're not the same".

Labyrinths have been used for centuries as a substitute for pilgrimages. Their origin is unknown, but the first indications of labyrinths date as far back as 4,5000 years ago. When Christian pilgrims could not travel to Jerusalem because of the expense and dangers, they walk the labyrinth. Interest in labyrinths has revived in the last twenty-five years as interest in spirituality in general has increased. To put it succinctly, the labyrinth is a "spiritual tool." It is a way of connecting to God, centering oneself, and focusing one's mind in prayer. Its circularity and turns to the left and right reinforces an integration of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, bringing balance, and helps in calming, clarifying, and focusing.

The labyrinth's ancient power derives from the fact that it is a symbol of the healing journey. The walk itself is a potent physical metaphor for the journeys of healing, spiritual and emotional growth, and transformation. Because it involves the body in walking, it is a form of "embodied prayer" or "embodied spirituality".

## Making the Labyrinth Work for You

There is nothing magical about the labyrinth; it is just a tool. It may take us to the Holy, but it is not the Holy. Walking the labyrinth can just be a matter of waling in circles - or it can be a deeply spiritual practice. But, just as any journey is usually more pleasant with some advance preparation, so it is with the labyrinth. Conscious and mindful preparation often leads to a deeper, more transformational walk. To help make walking the labyrinth a spiritual practice, the following is suggested:

### **Prepare:**

Prepare yourself by "letting go and putting aside". At Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, they ask walkers to remove their shoes. This is a simple way to ritualize the act of preparation, the act of taking off or putting side. While shoe removal is not practice for the IHUMC labyrinth, you can create your own ritual by turning off your cell phones, locking your things in the car, and making yourself physically comfortable by removing your jacket or hat. The Butterfly Prayer Garden and the Shade Prayer Garden have both been created specifically for meditation and preparation. Benches have been provided to encourage you to sit for a moment, set aside the frenzy of appointments and endless lists, calm your thoughts, and prepare for your walk. Focus your attention on the here-and-now. Take this time for yourself and just Be.

## Making the Labyrinth Work for You...

**Conscious Intentions:** Either as a question or a statement, your intentions for walking the labyrinth should be consciously chosen and brought to the entrance. Do you have a question or an issue that you are struggling with? It could be as profound as, “Where does God need me to be in my life?” or as simple as, “Should I go back to school?” Other possible intentions include:

- Prayers for a particular person or situation
- Working through a particular emotion (such as anger, grief, fear, asking for guidance)
- Relationship or career issues
- Spiritual questions

Try to be concise and frame your intention or question so that it allows for open-ended exploration. A useful beginning is, “I am a pilgrim seeking...” whatever your conscious intention, what matters is that it matters to you.

As you prepare yourself and ponder your intention, you must also prepare yourself an open mind and heart to receive and hear what is revealed to you during your walk. It is important to “shed expectations” about what exactly will happen as you walk. You must willingly open yourself up to receive guidance that might challenge any preconceived “solutions” you might hold.

**Choose:** Choose a Scripture to read or prepare a meditation before starting your walk. The Book of Psalms is especially appropriate. Depending on your mood or need, there are Psalms of lament, praise, trust and thanksgiving. Take a few moments to sit and read the scripture over several times. Out of your reading, a word or phrase may strike you that you can carry into the labyrinth as you walk.

For example, “O God, you are my God, and I long for you” (Ps. 63). “Out of the depths, I cry to you. Lord, hear my prayer” (Ps. 130). “Come, Holy Spirit.” or “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). When you feel you are ready & have sufficiently prepared yourself, step up to the entrance of the labyrinth to begin your walk.

**Walking In:** There is no “right” way to walk - only your way, your path. However, begin your walk with a request for guidance and support from God. Affirm your intention and your commitment to truth. When you are ready, step through the arbor, enter the labyrinth, and leave the outside world behind.

It’s suggested that you walk as slowly as you can. But do whatever feels natural to you - walk at your own pace. You can stop if you want, or quietly pass if someone is on the path ahead of you. As you physically walk into the labyrinth, picture yourself walking “into” your intention. As you walk the twist and turns of the circuit, moving toward the center, become consciously aware of your surroundings and engage your sense. Feel the warmth of the sun and the wind’s gentle breeze. Listen to the crunch of your feet as you walk, step-by-purposeful-step on the crushed granite. Hear the birds singing, or the night sounds of the crickets and cicadas. Breathe deeply the fresh air, and inhale the scent of the blooming roses. Gaze out over the open vista of the south horizon, or focus on the beauty of the pavers and the crushed stone path. If your mind starts to wander and you find yourself starting to think about what all needs to get done, use your chosen Scripture reading or meditation to refocus. You may want to say your words or phrase, repeating it in harmony and timing with your breathing and steps. Other phrases or mantas that work well are:

“Lead me, Lord.” “Guide me, O God.” “Breath on me; breath of God.” “Heal me, God.” open your heart and open your mind. Let go and don’t try to control the experience. Make yourself aware and listen for answers.

**Reaching the Center** is a physical metaphor for the spiritual journey to your sacred center. Take some time to experience the center. Consider it the point of calm in a chaotic world. Take as much time as you need. You might use the bench for quiet meditation. You may wish to take along a book that has a guided meditation of Scripture passages. Or, you may simply try to empty your mind of words and listen to the silence. Do whatever works best for you. This is your walk, your experience...there is no right or wrong. When you are ready, when your “inner voice” or intuition tells you it’s time, exit the center and start your journey out of the labyrinth.

**Walking Out** is just as important as walking in. It should be of equal duration. In other words, no cutting across the path. Take the time to uncoil. Valuable insights are often revealed during the journey out. Many people find that during the journey in the labyrinth, they focus on a problem. The journey out is where they often find solutions. You may notice that your body feels lighter or that you are walking with more intention, integrity, and hopefulness. As you now walk the circuitous path in the opposite direction you entered, this forces your brain to shift and allows you to view and relate to your conscious intention from a different perspective.

Continue your meditative, purposeful walk until you find yourself once again at the entrance to the labyrinth.

**Leaving the Labyrinth:** When you reach the exit, turn and say a prayer of thanksgiving, a blessing, or re-read your Scripture/Psalm. When you are ready, pass through the arbor and return to the outer world.

**Integrating the Walk:** take a moment and reflect on your walk. Stay silent for a while. You may want to return to one of the prayer gardens and meditate. Or, you may just want to sit quietly in your car and explore your feelings. You might also spend a few minutes journaling about insights that came to you as you walked. Whatever you choose, savor the moment. And thank yourself for giving yourself this time for quiet spiritual growth and healing.

**Final Thoughts:** Like all prayer and spiritual practices, sometimes the experience of walking the labyrinth will be a powerful, insightful, or calming one; other times it will seem less moving. As with all prayer and spiritual practices, the important thing is that you try it and keep on practicing it. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to walk the labyrinth. You can’t get lost. Like all of life, it involves putting one foot in front of the other, and eventually you will find your way home.

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### **About the Authors:**

**Rev. Cheryl Somers-Ingersol**, former Indian Heights United Methodist Church pastor, served the members of this community for 16 years and is the vision behind the creation of this labyrinth.

**Adele L. Wilcoxon** is a member of this church, and the designer and project manager for the labyrinth and prayer gardens.