

Before you Walk the Labyrinth

Please silence all cell phones. During daylight, pre-apply sunscreen, bring a hat, a water bottle, and comfortable walking shoes. After sunset, please bring a flashlight. For safety, consider walking with a companion. **Note: there are no rest room facilities out by the labyrinth; plan ahead.**

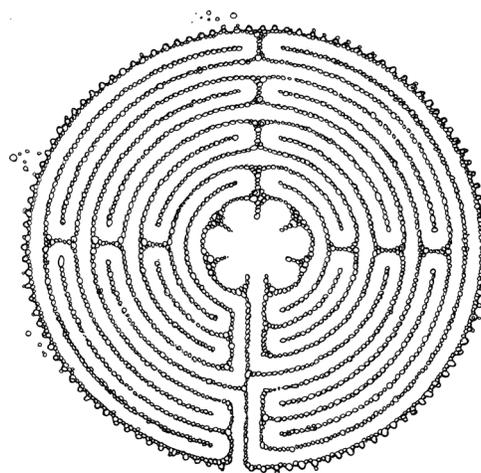
Unlike a maze, a labyrinth is a single path that leads you to the center and back out again — there are no intersections or choices to make, so you can't get lost. **Allow about 30-45 minutes to complete the labyrinth (entrance-to-center and then back out again) at a medium-slow pace. This allows for four or five minutes in the center for prayer.** If you walk the labyrinth at a medium-fast pace, you can complete the labyrinth in 15 to 30 minutes, allowing two or three minutes in the center for prayer. If you walk the labyrinth at a slow, meditative pace, you can expect your labyrinth journey to easily last an hour or longer.

Walking the Labyrinth

When you come upon the labyrinth from the prayer path, take a few minutes in prayer to quiet your heart and mind while sitting at the bench at the labyrinth entrance. Once you feel un-rushed and ready to begin, start at the entrance, walking quietly along the path as it winds toward the center, at whatever pace you're most comfortable. If you get tired or distracted, note your location, break out of the path and sit for a bit, and resume later. Find the pace that is right for you.

It's not uncommon to encounter another pilgrim walking toward you on the same path — just say a word of peace, or nod, and step off toward the right, rejoining the path once you've passed each other. When you reach the center, stay as long as you wish — stand or sit in the center, offer a prayer of thanksgiving. Some groups celebrate Holy Communion in the center as well. When you are ready, return along the same path on which you came in.

The prayer path and labyrinth are available 24 hours a day; if you walk the path after sunset or before sunrise, we'd ask that you take a flashlight with you and keep an eye out for cactus and for our animal friends (armadillos, raccoons, etc.) — being careful not to disturb them. **Feel free to replace stray rocks or tend to the weeds as you move along the path.** Let us know whenever the labyrinth needs attention. Thanks!



Covenant Labyrinth

7 GUIDED PILGRIMAGES

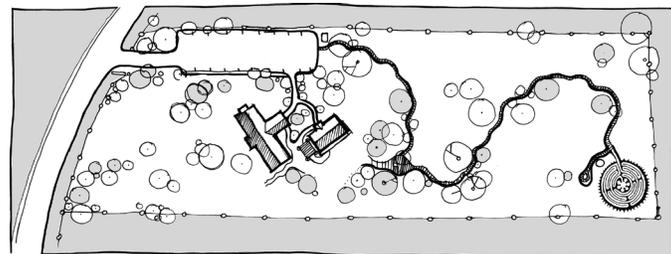
In the Middle Ages, Christians made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the Holy Lands. Those who couldn't make the journey could still participate in their own pilgrimage by walking labyrinths, intricately designed inlaid paths on cathedral floors.

Since then, labyrinths have been used as places of contemplative prayer — sacred spaces where people can slow down amidst our busy culture, in order to meditate and talk with God.

Here at Covenant, our wooded prayer path guides you to an eleven-circuit labyrinth — a Texas vernacular reinterpretation of the well-known medieval design at Chartres — our version is outlined in limestone found on site. This labyrinth was installed by church members during Lent and Easter of 2008.

We invite you to come walk the labyrinth.

The guided pilgrimages in this leaflet were designed for you, based on a variety of Christian sources — some ancient, some modern.



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7 Guided Pilgrimages

Here we've provided a variety of guided Christian pilgrimages — you may wish to choose one of these or simply “pray by looking around” on your way into and back out of the labyrinth. There's no “right way” to walk the labyrinth.

I. A Classic Threefold Path

- a. *Release*: As you start your inward journey, ask God to identify burdens you're needlessly carrying that need to be released (picture a clenched fist holding onto a possession contrasted with an open hand, ready to receive) — you may choose to start with a handful of pebbles (“burdens”) in your hand that you slowly name and release along the path or release into a small pile at the center.
- b. *Illumination*: Often the time at the center symbolizes illumination, having “surrendered our daily concerns”¹ as we approach the Holy One. Pray with outstretched, open empty palms symbolizing surrender. Receive light and life from God. Pray and seek insight.
- c. *Union with God*: The outward journey is a time for unrushed communion with the Holy. “Move back out into the world, replenished and directed.”¹ At the exit, you may choose to take a pebble in your pocket as a reminder of your time with God.

2. Ideas for Spontaneous Prayer

This guided pilgrimage incorporates a familiar prayer pattern for many Western Christians: the acronym “ACTS” comprises four facets of active prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and intercessory Supplication. Pilgrims can pray through each of these:

- a. *Confession*: Standing at the entrance before journeying, ask God's Spirit to show you the parts of your life (and those of your community or country) that do not match with the life God is calling you to lead. Take a few steps into the labyrinth: remind yourself of God's promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.
- b. *Thanksgiving*: Let your walk toward the center be spent giving thanks for God's help and presence during past days. In harder times, when it can be difficult to feel thankful at all, voice the things that are challenging in your life and look for signs of God at work in these situations.
- c. *Adoration*: At the center of the labyrinth, the the focus is on God, rather than on ourselves. We think of all God is and has done. Jesus teaches us to first of all love God with all our heart, mind and soul. Be creative. Sing a song to God. Recite a Psalm. List some of God's attributes out loud. Draw a picture in the dirt.
- d. *Supplication*: Mark your outward journey back into the “real world” by praying for others (and for yourself). To avoid a “shopping list” approach, your aim might be to pray for what God wants for others, and the things that they desire for themselves, rather than for what we would like them to have, or to be.

3. Asking God a Question

Bring a question, burden or decision you've been grappling with and use the practice of silence and solitude to turn it over to God. Pilgrims may want to bring a pocket bible and seek insight or comfort from the scriptures or read the Psalms as they pause on the journey. Don't demand answers, but “live amidst the question” and prayerfully seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit.

4. Christian Centering Prayer

Whereas an earlier pilgrimage focused on *active* prayers, this one cultivates *receptive* prayer, or *resting in God*. Trappist abbot Thomas Keating calls this *centering prayer*, which:

“...emphasizes a personal relationship with God ...the opening of mind and heart, our whole being, to God [who is] beyond thoughts, words and emotions, whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, thinking, feeling and choosing; The source of centering prayer is the indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; [the focus] is the deepening of our relationship with the living Christ. It tends to build communities of faith and bond the members together in mutual friendship and love. It is not a technique but a way of cultivating a relationship with God... ‘Be still and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46:10).”¹

Proceed down the labyrinth path in silence. As you walk, breathe deep, cleansing breaths, noticing your breath as you go. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a one-word prayer (e.g.: “Abba”, “Jesus”, “Mercy”, “Peace”, “Trust”). Whenever a distracting thought intrudes into your silence, you can acknowledge it and set it aside by returning ever-so-gently to your one-word sacred prayer. Cultivating an inner silence takes effort and patience, but it can be a window into the soul where God meets you and fills your spirit.

At the center of the labyrinth, stand or sit in silence with your eyes closed for a few minutes. Afterwards you may wish to pray the Lord's Prayer or recite a Psalm of praise to God before starting back. Use your outward journey to reflect on your centering prayer and to ask how God has spoken to you today.

5. The Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is a silent ‘phrase prayer’ meant to be prayed repeatedly, with its phrases coinciding with your breath:

[as you inhale]: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,

[as you exhale]: have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Make this your prayer both on the inward and outward labyrinth journey, with a break when you reach the center (Though this phrase has been prayed through the centuries as part of the Eastern tradition, in the 20th century it also began to be used in Anglican, Catholic and other churches in the West. The practice of repeating the prayer continually dates back to at least the fifth century).

6. Holy Communion & Prayer Stations

Works best with small groups (advance planning is required). Prayer stations — or *Stations of the Cross during Lent* — are set up along the prayer path. The inward journey is spent in preparation for Holy Communion: at the center, the Lord's Supper is administered by a pastor or laity. The outward journey is spent in silent communion with God; a Prayer of Thanksgiving follows.

7. Walk In Commemoration

“Many people walk the labyrinth to honor a benchmark in time. it may be a birthday or the anniversary of a close friend's death. We can walk the labyrinth to pray for a person who is undergoing surgery or to [sustain] leaders making an important decision.”¹