

Labyrinth Meditation
BY HEIDI SCHIUMPF

Walking a Prayerful Path

Life has a way of disrupting our inner peace and sense of direction. But walking the labyrinth remains a time-honored way to slow down and encounter God. My life was starting to sound like that insurance company list of most stressful life changes—a divorce, a new job, a return to graduate school. With each transition, I took it to prayer, seeking meaning and a sense of direction. Where was my life's path headed? What was the next step? I found some answers by literally walking in circles. A labyrinth program at a local women's spirituality center piqued my curiosity. I had heard of this ancient prayer tool but never actually experienced it. It turns out those medieval monks were onto something: the simple process of prayerful walking was meditative for me, prompting a sense of inner peace and surfacing spiritual insights. With the labyrinth, everything operates on the level of metaphor. The path symbolizes our life's journey. The circle represents wholeness, and the design leads us to our center. The labyrinth's twists and turns feel like the twists and turns of our lives. And when we walk it with other people, we are reminded that no one makes this journey alone. Although walking the labyrinth is definitely meant to facilitate individual introspection, it can also be a powerful experience of community. As I brushed shoulders with people who were passing me and observed those both behind and in front of me, I realized we're all on the same path, though some of us are at different points on the journey. Unlike a maze, which has dizzying decisions and tricky dead ends, the labyrinth has only one path that leads into the center and back out. Some describe walking the labyrinth as a three-fold path: a process of emptying and surrender as they enter, illumination at the center, and moving back into the world empowered and refreshed on the way out. The labyrinth, like many Christian symbols, predates Christianity yet has distinctive Christian roots. The design can be found in many European churches, the most famous being the eleven-circuit labyrinth with rosette center laid in the floor at Chartres Cathedral near Paris, which dates to about 1200. Like any meditative practice, walking the labyrinth is a way to quiet our busy minds in order to listen to the inner voice of God. At a time when many Catholics—especially younger ones—seem to be dusting off traditions from the past, the labyrinth can be a good stepping-off point for modern-day pilgrims trying to walk a spiritual path. Heidi Schlumpf is managing editor at U.S. Catholic magazine. Reprinted by permission of U.S. Catholic magazine, <http://www.uscatholic.org>. U.S. Catholic is published by the Claretians. Call 1-800-328-6515 for subscription information. The labyrinth at Boston College is approximately 70 feet in diameter and is a copy of the 13th-century labyrinth laid in stone on the floor of the nave of Chartres Cathedral. The Labyrinth was placed in memory of alumni who died 9/11/2001