



## *Praying in a labyrinth has been a prayer practice for many centuries.*

The journey into the center of a labyrinth signifies “letting go;” the return journey signifies openness to the new life God has given. The use of the labyrinth as a spiritual tool became popular during the time of the Crusades when conflict in the Holy Land prevented medieval Christians from making their required pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Church leaders designated seven great European cathedrals as pilgrimage sites and installed labyrinth patterns – technically, unicursal paths – on the floor of several of them. By following the path, pilgrims could make a symbolic journey to Jerusalem, with the center of the labyrinth standing in for their destination. Church labyrinths are characteristically flat or inlaid into the floor of the nave of the church. In recent years, a remarkable revival of interest in this ancient prayer pattern had again emerged. *There are many approaches to the labyrinth. One Christian approach to the labyrinth is based on the “threefold path” of Purgation, Illumination, and Union. These represent three stages in a labyrinth walk. A simple form of prayer while walking a labyrinth is as follows:*

□ Walking toward the center means to let go, to relinquish, to be cleansed, to become empty and open; it is a time of waiting and following the path. This releasing (purgation) is an emptying of worries and concerns. As you begin the journey, take a few moments to be quiet in God's presence. Invite the Spirit to be your guide on the path. Try not to hurry or become anxious about where the path will lead. Simply follow.

□ At the center of the path is a place of receiving (illumination); one enters with an open heart and receives what is given. It is here in the center, that you are receptive, prayerful and in a meditative state. When you come to the center, wait in silence. Listen to the sounds of the world around you. Listen to your own desires and hopes. Listen for God's Word to you.

□ Leaving the center of the labyrinth means retracing the path that brought one in; one may experience a surge of energy or creative insight and an invitation to be more authentic or confident and to take risks with God-given gifts. This integrating (union) is an empowerment to take ownership for what you do. The path out is that of becoming grounded and integrating the insight you receive. Many people sense a closer connection with God as they return. When you feel ready to return, follow the path again. Carry with you whatever you received at the center. Keep your heart and mind open to the Spirit's leading. As you leave the labyrinth, thank God for being with you on the journey.

***Palms up or Palms down? What do you do with your hands?*** The three stages of walking the labyrinth can be symbolized with a “palms up or palms down” approach with your hands/body movement. “Palms down” symbolize release or letting go of what is in your mind, while “palms up” indicates receiving and opening up to God's love and insight. Enter the labyrinth and walk to the center with palms down and center your thoughts on releasing conflictual issues and concerns in your life. When you reach the center turn your palms up to be receptive to insight. If you stay in the center for a moment, you can bring your hands together in prayer. As you walk out of the labyrinth keep your palms up to receive strength and guidance to make your insight manifest. As you leave the labyrinth turn to face the center and bring your palms together for a prayerful end to your walk.