

KIRKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
8336 Carrleigh Parkway, Springfield, VA 22152, 703.451.5320
Rev. Larry C, Lees, Pastor

Walking with Christ Labyrinth Prayer Walk

You are invited to walk with God in the labyrinth, a simple, yet profound way of prayer that intentionally offers silent reflection, meditative movement, and symbolic pondering of our spiritual longing to seek the center of life. As Christians we believe that center is Jesus Christ.

The spiritual discipline of silence and stillness is critical to one's relationship with God. Instead of praying, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening" we are easily guilty of praying, "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." Our dialogues with God quickly become monologues. We have become poor listeners. Even when on "retreat", silence is difficult. Though one may try to break away and walk the grounds or withdraw to a secluded spot, few are unable to find either the time or the place to truly be spiritually still and listen. The labyrinth offers that place.

Walking the labyrinth is a way of praying with the body that invites the divine presence into active conversation with the heart and soul. By engaging in this walking meditation, we are fully engaging our minds, bodies, and spirits.

Scheduled Dates for Kirkwood's Labyrinth Prayer Walks

World Communion Sunday, October 7, 2007	6:00 - to 8:00 pm
First Sunday in Advent, December 2, 2007	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Epiphany Sunday, January 6, 2008	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
First Sunday in Lent , February 10, 2008	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Good Friday, March 21, 2008	12:00 pm - 3:00 pm
Pentecost Sunday, May 11, 2008	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Father's Day Sunday, June 15, 2008	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
World Communion Sunday, October 5, 2008	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
First Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2008	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Come, walk our labyrinth and experience this ancient way of prayer.

You may request a time to prayerfully walk the labyrinth either alone or with family and friends. Such occasions might include a specific event or time in your faith journey such as:

Birth/Death ~ Marriage/Divorce
Graduation ~ Loss of Job ~ Mission Trip
Anniversary ~ Birthday

The Labyrinth as Christian Pilgrimage

The Christian Church recognizes the spiritual life of the Christian is that of a pilgrim in a foreign land. We are on a spiritual journey. Christian tradition includes within the practice of its faith an experience called the pilgrimage, rooted in the Hebrew faith. Before the building of the temple in Jerusalem the Hebrew people would pilgrimage to the Shechem and Bethel to celebrate the Passover and present their sin offerings. After the building of the temple in Jerusalem the Hebrew people would take a pilgrimage during the three pilgrim festivals of their faith, the Passover, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths.

It is very early in the life of the Christian Church that we find records of Christians who took a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Ignatious of Loyola required those who would join his order to take a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Today, we continue to experience the practice of the pilgrimage in the life of the church. More and more Christians are journeying to the Holy Land. Churches continue to celebrate their history with a pilgrimage celebrated as homecoming. Between the end of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the pilgrimages of today lies the pilgrimage of the labyrinth.

The oldest existing Christian labyrinth is probably the one in the fourth-century basilica of Reparatus, Orleansville, Algeria. The development of the high medieval seven-circuit labyrinth was a breakthrough in design. Its path of seven circles was cruciform and those incorporated the central Christian symbol. Use of the labyrinths flourished in Europe throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The design of Kirkwood's labyrinth was taken from the Ely Cathedral in Ely, England.

The labyrinth is a pilgrimage of prayer and meditation. The pathway is a single winding path that leads to the center of the labyrinth and back to the original starting point.

The pilgrimage of the labyrinth is modeled after the traditional Christian teaching on prayer that consists of Purgation, Illumination and Union.

1. **Purgation** is the path to the center of the labyrinth. In prayer and silence one walks towards the center in prayer to release all that has filled our life and keeps us from being present with God. It is a time of reflection, searching and releasing all of the things that keep us from experiencing the presence of God.
2. **Illumination** is the focus of the center of the labyrinth. Emptied of those things that keep us from experiencing the presence of God, we silence ourselves to become fully present with the divine, the Holy Spirit. We seek illumination of the Holy Spirit in our life with its healing and renewing power. We desire to be fully present with God.
3. **Union** is the path back to the beginning. We are filled with presence of God's Spirit and the insight and healing that has been given us. In union with the in-dwelling Spirit, we walk back to serve God and neighbor. This is the goal of the Christian life.

There are countless testimonies of those who have walked the pilgrimage of the labyrinth and have had a profound spiritual experience. In the September 1999 Guidepost, an article entitled, "A Walk Through Time," by Executive editor Mary Ann O'Roark, tells of her powerful experience when she walked the labyrinth in Chartres, France. "If this pilgrimage is an encounter with the Holy Spirit, like other pilgrimages are, and is an opportunity to encounter God's grace, than we must conclude that it is a means of grace. For like any other spiritual discipline, it

As you enter into this experience, we make several requests and suggestions:

- ✝ Take some time before you begin. Sit down or walk around the labyrinth and think about what issues you may wish to reflect upon as you go on this journey.
Perhaps you will want to ask Christ to be your Shepherd and Guide on this walk. Whatever you do, give yourself a few moments to “disengage” from the rest of your day and relax, so that you can really “be here” for this meditative walk.
- ✝ Remove your shoes, if comfortable, to remind you of your holy intent to walk with God.
- ✝ Maintain silence during your walk for your own reflection and that of others.
- ✝ Proceed at your own pace. You may pause at various points, if you wish, and you may pass others. When meeting others, feel free to acknowledge one another, keeping the silence.
- ✝ Follow the path and you will reach the center. This statement is true, both theologically and in terms of the design of the labyrinth. You will notice that at times you are far from the center and at other times close. How is that symbolic of your own journey with God? You will discover that at times the path only goes a short distance before turning again, yet there are longer stretches free from twists and turns. Have you experienced such times?
- ✝ The walk to the center purposefully allows time to shed whatever it may be that could keep you from listening to Christ, once you arrive at the center.
- ✝ When you reach the center, feel free to remain for awhile. Sitting, kneeling, or standing, you may wish to meditate, read silently any materials you have brought with you, or pray.
- ✝ When you leave the center, follow the path again. It will lead you back to your starting place. This means, of course, that you may pass other pilgrims who are on their way to or from the center.
- ✝ You may wish to use the trip toward the center as a time to “shed” other concerns, reflect on your history, and generally prepare yourself for devotion at the center. On your return, you may wish to think about what you have gained that you want to take “back to the world.”
- ✝ We invite you to take time after your walk to sit or stand around the labyrinth for further reflection, journal writing, and/or prayer.