

# **SOLSTICE LABYRINTH WALK**

**Labyrinth at St Luke's Christchurch**

**4pm 21 December 2022**

**Rose Isbell**

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**What is a Labyrinth?**

**Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral**

**Labyrinth at Grace Cathedral**

**Labyrinth at St Luke's Christchurch**

**Walking a Sacred Path**

**Walk and Meet at White Chairs**

# Introduction

Welcome to this Solstice Labyrinth walk at the St Luke's Labyrinth.

I'd like to give a brief introduction to Labyrinths first.

And then to mention the three great Labyrinths, as far as I am concerned:

The Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France

The Labyrinths at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and

The Labyrinth at St Luke's in Christchurch, of course!

I'll give some guidelines and advice about walking a labyrinth.

Then we can walk the labyrinth, and meet back at the white chairs.

# What is a Labyrinth?

## Description

I think a really good description of what a labyrinth is, is the one given at the entrance to this Labyrinth:

*A labyrinth is a pattern marked on the ground or floor that is walked as an aid to reflection and meditation...*

*A labyrinth has only one path and is not a maze.*

You can't get lost in a labyrinth – if you lose your way you will end up either at the middle of the labyrinth, or back at the start again.

So, while the purpose of a maze is to lose yourself, the purpose of a labyrinth is to find yourself!

## Types of Labyrinth

**The Medieval labyrinth** at Chartres Cathedral in France is the most famous pattern.

The 11 circuit design is divided into 4 quadrants, symbolic of the cross. The cross is made of lunations, or moon shaped areas at the bends of the labyrinth.

There is a six petalled rose in the centre, and the petals can be seen as portraying the qualities of Love, Faith, Hope etc.

Or to represent the six days of creation, or even the six parts of The Lord's Prayer.

(See illustration.)

**The Classical design** can represent any number of geometrical patterns, and is the most ancient of labyrinth designs. It appears as petroglyphs in Spain (dating from around 2000BCE), on silver coins in Crete, on rocks in northern Europe, bark in Indonesia, and carved on rocks in the desert of the American Southwest.

**A Contemporary Labyrinth** does not conform to any particular geometric design, but it still has a single path to the inside and back to the outside.

**In a Processional Labyrinth** there is still one path, but it can lead from the entrance, to the middle, and then on to a separate exit. These are especially useful for gatherings like Festivals and Weddings.

# Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral

Labyrinths have been around for 4000 years, but the main interest in them comes from the Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France.

This is a Christian Cathedral of Notre Dame/ Our Mother that was built on an ancient pagan site, and on a site where Ley lines cross. It sits on a hill and is very imposing when you approach it through large areas of wheat fields.

After a fire, the Cathedral was rebuilt in 1201, in a high Gothic style, with beautiful architecture, exquisite stained glass windows, and an elaborate labyrinth.

There are statues there, including one of Pythagoras, and the design of the labyrinth probably reflects Pythagorean theory.

There were three Black Madonnas in Chartres Cathedral, one on each level, but since renovations started the one in the main church has controversially been painted white.

The Labyrinth there was not used for centuries, and was covered with rows of chairs, until Rev Dr Lauren Artress visited in the early 90s, with parishioners from Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. She pushed the chairs back and walked the labyrinth there.

Lauren brought Labyrinth walking to the English speaking world, and started the organisation called Veriditas (after Hildegard of Bingen's word for "greening", Viriditas.), Now many groups go on pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral and walk the Labyrinth there.

I have been to Chartres before the labyrinth was in use, and thanks to the pandemic have been fortunate to join in pilgrimages there,

both with her organisation Veriditas, and through Ubiquity University, where Andrew Harvey began been taking pilgrimages.

The Ubiquity pilgrimages are led by Banafsheh Sayyad, a Persian mystic and Sufi dancer, and it was considered a breakthrough when she was asked to dance on the labyrinth three years ago.

Chartres Cathedral is still a working church, but the labyrinth is uncovered on Fridays (except for weddings and funerals), and by arrangement in the evening.

# Labyrinth at Grace Cathedral

Lauren Artress is a Canon at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, and it is she who brought the labyrinth to the world.

I was fortunate to do my Labyrinth Facilitator training with her, and have done several seminars, as well as a monthly zoom call for labyrinth facilitators.

In Grace Cathedral they have a permanent labyrinth in the Cathedral, and one outside in the public space.

They have a lot of activities, such as full moon walks with candles, and yoga on the labyrinth.

A group of elderly Chinese ladies do Tai Chi on the outside labyrinth early each morning, and then run it together, shoulder to shoulder, and giggling loudly.

My daughter left to live in the UK this year, and I have a photo of her walking the one here at St Luke's the day before she left, and then the one at Grace Cathedral two days later.

Labyrinths are also in Churches, schools, universities, communities, hospitals and clinics. They are permanent, portable (on canvas), temporary (such as with fabric or rope), or ephemeral (on sand).

*Walking the labyrinth has reemerged as a metaphor for the spiritual journey and a powerful tool for transformation.*

*This walking meditation is an archetype, a mystical ritual found in all religious traditions.*

*It quiets the mind and opens the soul.*

Lauren Artress

# **Labyrinth at St Luke's Christchurch**

This Labyrinth here at St Luke's is a Chartres style labyrinth, a medieval design with 11 circuits.

There was a beautiful church and organ here, that sadly had to be demolished after the earthquakes.

The Church owned, and regularly used a canvas labyrinth which was destroyed as well.

This labyrinth is made from bricks saved from the demolition of the church.

The parishioners prepared the base and built the rose in the middle, and the Student Volunteer Army laid the bricks, all within one day. A liquidamber tree is in the centre, and there has been a garden around the perimeter.

I have been in touch with David Moore, the Vicar who was behind the development of the labyrinth, and he is pleased to know that the labyrinth is still being used. He would like to visit it when he comes to Christchurch next year.

I realised the labyrinth was here in April this year, and organised a walk for World Labyrinth Day in early May – the first of many walks throughout the world.

At that stage it was what Lauren calls a 'lonely labyrinth', one that has been not maintained.

Unfortunately I had done a seminar on Labyrinth Restoration, so I spent a lot of the winter working on the labyrinth here, and I am pleased that the weeds and moss have not returned.



I'd nearly finished the garden when I fell and broke my arms, so I am sorry the garden maintenance isn't as good as I'd like now, as I have my Light House Garden to maintain as well.

But if anyone is able to help us, we'd be very grateful – we meet here at 10am on Saturdays.

The area is also a Sacred Maori site, as it is thought that the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Maori Chief Tautahi was buried here. Otautahi is named after him.

I have a vision that this labyrinth could be a central space in Christchurch where people can walk, meditate, pray, and find peace and serenity.

Many cities throughout the world are building labyrinths for the benefit of their communities, and also schools, universities, libraries and hospitals.

So if the land goes up for sale, wouldn't it be wonderful if Ngai Tahu would be able to purchase it, and use it to honour their ancestor, as well as retaining the labyrinth for public use.

# **Labyrinth at The Light House Christchurch**

Inspired by the labyrinths I've discovered, I have constructed a labyrinth at my home and clinic, The Light House.

It has a classical design, with 5 channels.

I have a logo, which is the Flower of Life symbol superimposed into a rose, and this became a mandala in the centre of the labyrinth.

There is a blue crystal grid placed on top.

Beside the labyrinth there is a Temple Garden, based on a Medieval monastery garden, with roses, medicinal herbs, and fruits and berries.

There is also small Temple, an Egyptian themed room, and a clinic room.

# Walking a Sacred Path

From the notice at the entrance of this Labyrinth at St Luke's:

*The labyrinth is viewed as a metaphor for life's journey.*

*It offers us lessons as we walk the path.*

*Walking the labyrinth assists us to address challenges, meditate, pray and find peace and serenity.*

And by the way, the QR codes on the poster link to more information about labyrinths, and to the Facebook page for this labyrinth here.

## STAGES

### **Releasing (letting go)**

Walking into the labyrinth.

This is the time to quiet the mind, let go of the details, distractions and extraneous thoughts.

Open your heart to feel whatever it might feel.

Become aware of your breathing.

Relax and find your natural pace.

### **Receiving (listening)**

When you reach the centre, sit or stand there as long as you like.

This is a place of reflection, meditation and prayer.

Receive what is there for you to receive.

### **Returning (reflecting, resolving, reclaiming)**

Walking out of the labyrinth.

When you are ready, follow the same path back out.

Walking out, integration of your experience can occur.

You take back out into the world that which you have received.

## **GUIDELINES**

Follow your natural pace.

Walk at the speed you wish, and you may change speed or stop as you go.

Feel free to move around others, or let others walk around you.

This is easiest to do on the turns.

The path is a two-way street - you will meet others coming out as you go in. turns are good place to pass.

Let your gaze be soft as you walk.

Let everything be a metaphor – whatever you feel is an indication of how things are for you.

No photographs please

## **EXPECTATIONS**

Each labyrinth experience is different.

It can be subtle or you may have a powerful reaction.

Sometimes a labyrinth experience takes time to release its meaning and can evolve over months following a walk.

Whatever occurs, listen to your heart and take all the time you need.

And to finish, a quote from Lauren Artress's book *Walking a Sacred Path*:

*The path becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. The rhythm of walking, placing one foot in front of the other, quiets the mind, relaxes the body and refreshes the spirit. Walk it with an open heart and an open mind.*

# **Walk and Meet at White Chairs**

Now we can go and walk the labyrinth, and then meet up here at the White Chairs afterwards.

I will be at the entrance while you start walking, and can guide you when to start your walk.

Rose Isbell

21 December 2022

Christchurch, New Zealand