

A Way in the Wilderness

Praying with a Labyrinth

Labyrinths have played a part in the spiritual journeys of countless people over the centuries. Its origins are lost in the mists of time but examples of circular paths can be found throughout what we now call Celtic lands and a famous one was created in Chartres Cathedral. This was a temporary labyrinth in the grounds of the priory on Holy Island.



There has been increased interest in labyrinths over recent times. They are not mazes which are designed to be puzzles and can confuse and get you lost. Although you are constantly changing direction and seem to move towards and then away from the centre, a labyrinth is a path and once you set your foot on it, you are led inevitably to the centre. Because you are well-guided, your mind and heart are free to contemplate. Some people like to enter a labyrinth and simply allow the path so “speak” to them but here are some ideas for using a labyrinth prayer to ponder our theme or God creating a way through the wilderness.

Finding a Labyrinth

Many religious houses have labyrinths and would be happy for individuals and groups to use them as part of a day – or part of a day – or reflection.

Prepared by the *Isaiah Journey* Working Group of the Bishops' Conference © 2023 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.
www.cbcew.org.uk/prayer-for-survivors-of-abuse

Creating a Labyrinth

The Chartres Labyrinth is very satisfying to create and to walk, but it is often simpler to create a Cretan version.

It is even possible to create your own. One could be mown into a parish garden lawn or created using stones at a beach or on a large area of grass. Ropes can be laid out to create the paths. One example below uses flour which is easy to erase at the end of your time of prayer.

Useful links for creating a labyrinth

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DExh0hSmsno> — using 12 stones and flour
- <https://zdi1.zd-cms.com/cms/res/files/701/LGHstepbystep2020.jpg> (starts with a cross)

Using a Labyrinth

Some people like to use a labyrinth “as is” – others prefer a little input to get the spiritual juices flowing. If you choose to offer input, avoid overloading the labyrinth – your aim is to open a way for the Spirit to speak to each individual.

- Give people a phrase to use as a mantra as they walk – until the words fall into the silence of walking. This can help to slow the pace and deepen the meditation. For example, suggest a step at the words in italics: *You will make a way through the wilderness.*
- Put simple prayer stations at points along the way. This could be a short scripture phrase or prayer intention. “For survivors...” “For police investigators...” “For Fr X...” The idea is to create a short pause but not to break the flow of the walk.
- Invite people to see Jesus at the centre and to ponder on the way in what they would like to say to him – or hear from him. They then stay in the centre for a time and ponder what they received (or what they did not) on the way out.
- In the evening or at a night-vigil, it is very effective to use lights along the path – preferably solar powered rather than candles or tee-lights. This can help people to appreciate that the Lord is offering a light to the path – helping people to make their way through a spiritual wilderness.

Personal Use

It is possible to use a finger labyrinth for indoor use. Labyrinths made of wood can often be found in cathedral shops or online. Alternatively, one can be printed out. Two options are offered below.

As with most spiritual exercises, it can be useful to make a note of any thoughts or insights that occur along the way – or to chat about them with someone you trust.



