

# The Path to Enlightenment

People walk one-third-mile-long labyrinth in search of clarity

BY DON LATTIN  
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In the basement of Grace Cathedral, nine pilgrims step into the labyrinth, a giant, spiraling mandala painted on canvas and patterned after a design etched into the floor of France's Chartres Cathedral.

One man walks slowly, palms up as if to receive divine inspiration. Another clutches his hands to his heart, as if to grasp some interior message.

Behind them, a woman walks the labyrinth, swinging her arms playfully. Another woman proceeds with exceeding care, feeling every step.

"It's like a meditation, or a prayer, but you're actually doing something," said Maureen Rylance, emerging after her third journey into the labyrinth. "Each time, I've gone in with a different question. It has a way of clearing your mind, of putting you one on one with your center. It's like you receive something from your inner teacher."

New Age, you say? Try Middle



BY EDDIE LEDESMA FOR THE CHRONICLE

A labyrinth painted on canvas and patterned after a design in the floor of the Chartres Cathedral is temporarily at Grace Cathedral.

Age. During the Middle Ages, monks and other pilgrims walked the labyrinth at Chartres and other French cathedrals, sometimes crawling along the first section to purge themselves of demons.

In the center, they reached the symbolic point of illumination or enlightenment, only to turn around and walk back out into the world.

"It's a divine imprint, a sacred form," said the Rev. Lauren Artress, canon pastor of Grace Cathedral. "Walking this path is a way to balance yourself, to clear your mind amid all the chaos of the world. To me, it is something that really wants to be reborn."

Rebirthing the labyrinth is exactly what Artress has in mind.

Her canvas creation will be unveiled in the main cathedral sanctuary the evening of December 30 for the second annual "Singing for Your Life" event at Grace Cathedral. Unlike at a recent rehearsal in the basement, the labyrinth

will be illuminated with candles and medieval music.

Meanwhile, Artress and the Rev. Alan Jones, dean of the Episcopal cathedral, are looking to raise money to install a semi-permanent labyrinth in the floor of the ornate Gothic sanctuary or in a meditation garden outside.

Their temporary labyrinth, See Page D6, Col. 1

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## A Walking Meditation

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painted in Episcopal purple, is 35 feet in diameter. The path to the center and back out is one-third of a mile long. Unlike a maze, it is unicursal, meaning there is only one path that traces the entire pattern and inevitably leads to the center.

Walking the labyrinth, one winds toward the center, but then begins meandering back toward the circumference. At some point, almost without warning, the center appears.

To Jones and Artress, that pattern is a fitting metaphor for the spiritual search: "The spiritual journey of humanity does not proceed in a straight line but meanders in apparent repetitive circles which nevertheless lead to a healing center," they write in a description of the Labyrinth Project.

Scott Steeper, a resident of San Mateo and member of Grace Cathedral, went into the labyrinth with a question about relationships.

"It's a great metaphor for relationships," he said. "At times, you are walking near people, and then

*'You ask yourself what you have to let go of to find illumination. In the center, you find a point of meditation.'*

a long way apart, and then near people. Sometimes you're walking in tandem, but sometimes you have to step aside."

Artress, a trained therapist and ordained Episcopal priest, sees the labyrinth as both a devotional tool and a device for group therapy. "People who feel they are stuck in life, who are up against their own shadow, could walk it together and then talk about what they want to change in their lives.

"When you walk in, you are shedding, letting go," she said. "Your mind is clearing, and you start wondering what you were worrying about before. You ask yourself what you have to let go of

to find illumination. In the center, you find a point of meditation. You can stay as long as you want. On the way out, you meet other people on the path, and feel a kind of union. I like to think of it as joining God."

During a recent visit to France, Jones and Artress found the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral covered with chairs, unused by pilgrims. "There it was lying dormant in the center of one of the great pilgrimage churches in the world," she said. "It was like they didn't know what they had."

Artress sees the labyrinth as a "sacred archetypal pattern that emerged from the collective unconscious and was slowly birthed through people over the ages."

Its rediscovery, she said, can be seen through the words of Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychologist, who compared archetypal patterns to "an old riverbed along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it has flowed in this channel the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return to its old bed."