

Labyrinth Prison Project

Last year my wife Barbara made a seven circuit classical labyrinth for a project in her master degree program at OSU. I helped her with it, and we call it the “Rainbow Labyrinth” for obvious reasons.



The “Rainbow Labyrinth” is 15ft X 15ft, which means it can fit into smaller spaces than the large 36 foot canvas Chartres that St. Paul’s has here in Salem. I decided after this project that I would like to make a small Chartres labyrinth on canvas, but the project went on the back burner for a while.

About a month ago I was invited to participate in bringing a labyrinth into Oregon State Penitentiary for the prisoners to walk. Bunny Oliver, pastor of the Beaver Creek United Church of Christ, brought a 27 foot canvas Chartres labyrinth down from the West Linn Lutheran Church and 40 prisoners walked it that night. The response of the prisoners was overwhelming. Most had not even heard of a labyrinth before, but fell in love with it and indicated they would like to do it again.

I immediately went to work. I did the math and decided that a 20 foot diameter Chartres was about the smallest I could make that would be comfortable to walk. I was able to order a 20 X 20 canvas drop cloth online for \$36. I did the math for all of the proportions and started making templates. I used carpenter’s pencils, with a wire spooler and string for a compass and I started drawing.





The best part for me is that while this labyrinth is being birthed, people are walking St. Paul's Chartres labyrinth in the same space. It is a powerful spiritual experience to be working on a new labyrinth with this kind of energy in the space.

Once the drawing was done in pencil it was time to start coloring. I experimented and found that large chisel tip "Sharpie" markers worked well on the canvas. It is much less messy than paint and allows us to get volunteers involved in the coloring process. The large "Sharpies" come in four colors; black, red, green & blue. I think a green one would be great for Earth Day, and a red one would be quite attention getting, but we decided on blue for this one. I have a fantasy of doing one in each color and setting them all up next to each other for people to walk one after another. I bought three dozen markers for about \$1 apiece and then started asking for volunteers because there was a lot to do; and the volunteers appeared.



This is what the finished labyrinth looks like!



My name is Richard Poudrier. The first thing I would like to do is thank Robert Ferre for teaching me how to do this. I have been interested in labyrinths since I first discovered them about six years ago. I sometimes feel like Richard Dreyfuss in "Close Encounter's of the Third Kind". His character was obsessed with making models of a butte he had been imprinted with, and I cannot go near a beach without the overwhelming desire to draw a Chartres labyrinth in the sand.

My ancestry is French Catholic. On my father's side I have traced our first ancestor to come to the new world to a small village about 100 miles south of Chartres. Since Chartres was a pilgrimage point for Catholics I was feeling pretty confident some of my ancestors may have walked this labyrinth.

More recently I have been looking at the genealogy of my mother's side of the family. My mother's maiden name was Gamache. The first Gamache to come to "New France," now called Quebec, was Nicolas Gamache born April 17, 1639 at St. Illiers-la-Ville, *Chartres, France*. I have not yet connected a direct line of descent from Nicolas, but I am pretty confident that I will. Walking a Chartres labyrinth feels to me like a connection with my ancestors.