

# THE CIRCLE UNBROKEN

Labyrinths and their calming effects have stood the test of time

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A labyrinth is not a maze. Let's get that out of the way from the get-go.

Unlike a maze, with its subterfuges and dead ends, a labyrinth is designed to take you in a circuitous way deep into its center.

You walk the path. You reach the goal. It's that simple.

But those who have come to know and love labyrinths say something more happens when they make the journey.

The walk brings peace. It calms. It guides. It transforms.

Labyrinths have been around for thousands of years and just now their popularity is on the rise. Where a decade ago just a few were scattered throughout Oregon, today there are more than 130, said Kay Kinneavy, a member of Labyrinth Network Northwest, a group that two short years ago didn't even exist.

In October, Oregon will host an international labyrinth conference in Portland.

But there are several labyrinths right here in Lane County for those who can't make the trip.

They can be found in church courtyards and hospitals, at medical clinics and private businesses. They can even be found in private gardens, such as the one Netti Garner built at her Cottage Grove area home.

Garner, who teaches nursing at Lane Community College, first became entranced by labyrinths at a body and soul conference in Portland.

"It was a wonderful experience," she said, describing how a labyrinth leads into small tight spaces before opening up. It's a profound process that, for Garner, somehow bypasses the rational part of the brain. It brings a feeling of deep peace, she said.

Now she leads walks for those who seek out her labyrinth, happy to share an experience that can't be fully explained.

Kinneavy thinks that labyrinths resonate with people today because they provide relief from the hectic pace of contemporary life.

"For most people it's because we live in such a frantic stressful society," she said. "Walking the labyrinth is a time of quiet calm. It's a form of body

prayer. It's a walking meditation for people who can't sit still."

Labyrinths can be walked alone or in groups, said Anne Gordon, who facilitates a monthly labyrinth walk at Sacred Heart Medical Center at RiverBend.

Walking with others provides an intriguing metaphor for relationships, Gordon said. Sometimes you find yourself close to someone, then the labyrinth's path carries them far away.

"But we all end up at the center. We're going to the same place," she said.

Labyrinths come in a variety of styles, some more complex than others. At their simplest, they are painted designs on concrete or even canvas. Some people use pavers and gravel to create the path.

Garner created hers with lengths of tree limbs and wood shavings.

Perhaps the best known is the 11-circuit path at the Chartres cathedral in France dating back to 1200, Gordon said.

During that period Catholic labyrinths may have attracted a following among those who wanted a religious pilgrimage, but couldn't go to Jerusalem because of the Crusades, Gordon said.

But the labyrinths themselves predate Christianity with examples that go back at least 4,000 years, she said.

"It's something that's been with us for a long time," Gordon said.

A religious or spiritual practice for some, for others it's a profound way of coping with grief, she said.

"All you have to do is put one foot in front of the other. It's that way with the labyrinth. It's that way with grieving," she said.

Kinneavy has been inspired by what she's seen at labyrinths: A mother with an angry teenage daughter walk the circuit and then are able to sit quietly talking afterward, or people in business suits walking the labyrinth with those who are homeless at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

But perhaps Kinneavy's favorite labyrinth story concerns a young boy, overly active and easily distracted, who walked a labyrinth with his mother. The mother had explained the labyrinth walk as a way of praying, Kinneavy said. After they got to the center, the young boy didn't want to leave, even at his mother's urging, Kinneavy said.

"He told her: 'God's not done talking to me yet,'" she said.

*"It's a form of body prayer. It's a walking meditation for people who can't sit still."*

— KAY KINNEAVY, LABYRINTH NETWORK NORTHWEST

## **LABYRINTHS**

Conference: Oct. 8-10, McMenamins Edgefield outside of Portland. More information can be found at [www.labyrinthsociety.org](http://www.labyrinthsociety.org)

Locator: Find labyrinths at [labyrinthlocator.com](http://labyrinthlocator.com)

State group: Labyrinth Network Northwest at [www.labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org](http://www.labyrinthnetworknorthwest.org)

Garner's labyrinth: [www.prioryfarm.org](http://www.prioryfarm.org)

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