

Mercer Island church welcomes visitors with new labyrinth

Emmanuel Episcopal Church (emmanuelmi.org), located at 4400 86th Avenue S.E., Mercer Island, WA 98040, has a new labyrinth. The beautiful, fully accessible prayer path represents the culmination of eight years of preparation, planning and building.

The eleven-circuit Chartres design is based on the oldest surviving medieval Christian labyrinth, which was installed in Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France in 1201. The labyrinth is 45' in diameter, with 18" walkways combining 12" pavers with 6" fills of gravel. Three rows of 12" pavers comprise the outer circuit, for use by people using strollers, walkers, and/or wheelchairs. An outdoor "room" surrounds the labyrinth with ornamental perennials, native trees, shrubs and ground covers.



"I received, as a gift from my brother, an introduction to meditation when I was in high school. In the summer of 2008, I took a refresher course from him. Then, in the fall of 2008, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Through diagnostic biopsies, surgery, chemotherapy, radiation and reconstructive surgery, I counted on meditation to keep me calm and strong. I dreamed of building a labyrinth someday, so that I could walk outdoors and meditate at the same time. That dream has come true. I now walk and meditate, starting with the Cascades at my back and the Olympics ahead of me." –Margaret Philbrick

The labyrinth committee started small nearly eight years ago, and grew over time. Margaret Philbrick, a member of the church, was the organizing force. Lesley Bain, architect, drew up the plans and helped Emmanuel work within city tolerances for building on church grounds. Peter Davis, owner of Peter Davis Builders, led the professional and volunteer building team.

The committee grew to include many people drawn to the project, each of whom contributed an essential perspective or skill. Supporters of the project included a photographer, a sign and wall builder, a landscape visualizer, church

elders, a handicapped access expert, several fund-raising leaders, and more. Individuals donated hundreds of hours of their time and skills. Examples include two Emmanuel work parties, one Scout Troop 457 work party, a Boy Scout Eagle project, donation of builder's time, donation of architect's time, and use of church staff time.

A formal dedication of the labyrinth with the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia presiding is planned for April 2, 2011. The Western Washington Labyrinth Network is planning to hold its spring gathering at the church on April 30, 2011. When WWLN contacted the church about the possibility of hosting their meeting, Anna Studeny of the staff remarked that "this is exactly what we were hoping would happen!"

The labyrinth is available for public use at all times, and the church welcomes all who come in peace. A bright

spotlight in the parking lot sheds a shadowy light onto the labyrinth at night, which is enough light for some people. Others use flashlights. In the future the church hopes to place solar or low-voltage lighting around the edge of the labyrinth. A large supply of umbrellas are available for labyrinth walkers to borrow in the event of rain.

The church recommends using the following directions if you are interested in visiting the labyrinth:

From Seattle: I-90 East, Take Exit 7B to Island Crest Way, Go up hill, first light is SE 40th St, take Left here, Right at first light, 86th Ave SE, Church is at the corner of 86th Ave SE & SE 44th St...drive past church and take Left into south parking lot

From Bellevue/Eastside: I-90 West, Take Exit 8 to E Mercer Way, Left on E Mercer Way (go over overpass), Right on SE 36th St which turns into Gallagher Hill Rd., Right on SE 40th St, Left on 86th Ave SE, Church is at the corner of 86th Ave SE & SE 44th St...drive past church and take Left into south parking lot

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