

Walking labyrinth's one way to welcome autumn

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By **Nancy Haught, The Oregonian**



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Carley Friesen

The outdoor labyrinth at Mount Tabor Presbyterian Church is a simpler design than the one at Chartres Cathedral in France.

Today is the autumnal equinox, marking the official start of fall in the Northern Hemisphere.

For some, the shift in seasons is a good time to walk the labyrinth. In the Portland area, three labyrinths are open today and visitors are encouraged to walk them, no reservations required.

Except some people do have reservations. The most common misunderstanding is that a labyrinth is a maze and includes blind alleys and dead-ends. Not true, says Sandra R. Stumpf of Troutdale, a member of the labyrinth guild at **St. Luke the Physician Episcopal Church** in Gresham.

The winding but one-way path of the labyrinth is pre-Christian in its origins but was adopted by Christianity centuries ago. The most famous example was laid in the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France, probably in the 13th century.

There are about **120 labyrinths in Oregon**, at schools, in parks, near hospitals and on church grounds, all walked regularly by people who are religious and those who aren't. Stumpf would like to assure those who are afraid of the experience to try it.

"People are afraid they'll get lost," she says. "But the labyrinth is a clear path with clear turns that are made to make your mind relax." St. Luke's labyrinth is outdoors, painted on concrete in the Chartres design. Situated in a garden, the path is surrounded by a separate walkway.

"Some people walk around the labyrinth," Stumpf says, never setting foot on the winding path. "Some people find just being in its presence is an amazing journey in itself."

Labyrinth walks

Three groups invite people to walk the labyrinth today, the first day of fall. There is no cost and reservations are not required.

From **9:15 a.m. to**

Her own experience with walking the labyrinth began at a time when she needed a wheelchair or walker to move around it.

"I used it as a tool to urge me on to get better. That first time I completed it, I got courage," she says. "I walk it on a regular basis and I don't always walk it with a distinct intent, but I always come away with more than when I entered it."

Another misconception is that the labyrinth is only suited for walkers with traditional religious backgrounds.

"There's nothing inherently religious about a labyrinth," says Judy Brodkey, who facilitates the labyrinth at **Unity of Portland** in Southeast Portland. "People of many different faith traditions -- and people with absolutely no religious leanings -- walk the labyrinth and find the experience satisfying," she says.

Religious people can pray as they walk; others meditate or let their minds wander.

"There is nothing inherently magical or mystical about it," Brodkey says. "Labyrinths just provide a wonderful, peaceful path that can help us on the journey of our lives. Sometimes the path of a labyrinth becomes a metaphor for our lives, and we become aware of lessons we can learn along the way."

The Rev. Carley Friesen, associate pastor at **Mount Tabor Presbyterian Church**, often works with people who are not Presbyterian or Christian, but see themselves as spiritual but not religious. Some of them walk the labyrinth, she says.

"Anything I can do to encourage someone's spiritual practice is good for them, to get them in touch with their soul life. Whether or not that will lead them into church or not, that's not my aim," she says. "If we pay attention to our soul lives, we'll be more faithful people living in community and on our earth."

Friesen remembers her first encounter with a labyrinth. She walked it alone inside a large empty room.

"I tend to be a somewhat inhibited person," she says. "It was fascinating to me: Walking into the center, letting go of the junk of your life -- middle or center is a place with room to be receptive -- and, coming back out, taking on new intentions. It was particularly powerful to me, to connect my spirit and my body."

The labyrinth at Mount Tabor Presbyterian is a simpler design than the one at Chartres. It's marked with paving stones, but walkers tread on the grass.

10:15 a.m. in the church parking lot of Unity of Portland, 4525 S.E. Stark St., Portland. Park on the street or in the lot nearest to Stark to maintain quiet for those who are walking the labyrinth. Bring a cushion or chair if you want to sit for a while before or after your walk. For more information, call **Judy Brodkey**, labyrinth facilitator, 503-234-1012I.

Between **2 p.m. and 4 p.m.** in the backyard of Mount Tabor Presbyterian Church, 5441 S.E. Belmont St., Portland. The walk is part of the church's second annual TaborFest celebration. For more information, contact the Rev. **Carley Friesen**, 503-234-6493.

From **6 p.m. to 8 p.m.** at St. Luke the Physician Episcopal Church, 120 S.W. Towle Ave., Gresham. For more information, contact Sandra R. Stumpf, 503-661-0271.

"We suggest that people take their shoes off. There is something sacred about actually touching the earth," Friesen says. "We all tend to be disconnected."

-- **Nancy Haught**

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