

# Walking the Labyrinth

by Bonnie Odiorne, Ph.D.

What does a labyrinth have to do with peace? What *is* a labyrinth? A labyrinth is an ancient form found in many cultures, based on the shape of a spiral. Most people think a labyrinth is a maze. In a maze you have to make choices to take a left or right turn—to solve a puzzle. You have to find the right way in and the right way out. But, a labyrinth is not a maze. A labyrinth has only one path—the way in is also the way out. The labyrinth inlaid in the floor of Chartres cathedral in France is the most classic example of this form.

People walk the labyrinth for meditation, for stress reduction, for prayer, for an intention. It can help you focus, relax, become more aware of thoughts and emotions. Many cultures and religions say that peace in the world can only be created from the peace we can find within ourselves. Walking the labyrinth we can quiet our minds and walk a path step by step. After a walk, one student said, “I can do this if I take it one step at a time. I can do *anything* if I take it one step at a time.”

Labyrinths were very popular during the time of great cathedral-building in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe where labyrinths often represented the pilgrimage to Jerusalem or the journey of faith to the Heavenly City. Eventually labyrinths were forgotten, seen perhaps as a kind of “pagan” remnant of the old cathedral builders. Recently, many have rediscovered labyrinths as a spiritual tool.

When I became lead instructor and program developer for a family literacy program in Waterbury, CT, I was excited, since I saw an elementary school as a perfect place to hold labyrinth walks—or often runs, in the case of chil-

dren. When I presented the idea, I received only mild interest. But after September 11th, I thought it crucial that the school community have some kind of activity to work through the pain, shock,



*Children and adults walking on Bonnie's canvas labyrinth.*

and grief we all felt. In response to the tragedy, children began creating strings of peace flags to memorialize the event. I thought the labyrinth would be a perfect accompaniment and the school administration agreed. I brought my labyrinth canvas into the gym and laid it on the floor. The labyrinth was open to the entire school to invite the children, parents, and teachers to experience something out of the ordinary that could help them through that unsettling time. The adults who walked were quiet and reflective. They didn't say much, except thanking me for the experience or commenting on how “interesting” it was.

When I presented the labyrinth to the children, I wanted them see it as a special place, something magical, like the Yellow Brick Road. I suggested that they think about what was on

their mind, what they wanted. When I asked the children to reflect before the walks, they didn't just focus on the Twin Towers or even on peace. They often thought of what would bring peace in their lives. One boy said he was thinking of his father in Bridgeport whom he couldn't see. His walk was lonely, but he found his father's presence. Another child, intimidated by all the twists and turns of the pattern, finally reached the center and overcame her fear of being lost.

If we find peace in our hearts and peace in our everyday relationships, perhaps we can believe that world peace is possible. We can receive—from the labyrinth and other tools for meditation and inner healing—the strength to *do* whatever we feel is needed to promote peace. Walking the labyrinth is an active expression of A. J. Muste's famous saying: "There is no way to Peace. Peace is the way."

### Finding A Labyrinth Near You

Many different forms of the labyrinth have been created nationally and internationally since the early 1990s, and can be found in churches, hospitals, prisons, schools, public parks, and private yards. They can be found in different patterns and sizes and are made from all kinds of materials—bricks, marble, stones, soup cans, canvas—whatever touches the creator's imagination.

Labyrinth Locator Veriditas  
<[www.veriditas.net](http://www.veriditas.net)>

The Labyrinth Society  
<[www.labyrinthsociety.org](http://www.labyrinthsociety.org)>

You can also use the finger labyrinth that's printed below. Instead of walking, trace the path with your finger.

---

*Bonnie Odiorne, Ph.D., works in the Writing Center at Post University in Waterbury, CT. She was the program coordinator/lead instructor of Families Forward Through Technology formerly at Chase Elementary School in Waterbury, CT. She is a certified Veriditas labyrinth facilitator and has led groups in Chartres.*



### Walking the Labyrinth for Peace

You can do this activity while walking or using the finger labyrinth to the left.

John Ridder, creator of the World Peace Labyrinth, suggests that as you walk [or trace with your finger] the labyrinth, you allow your mind to become peaceful and contemplate world peace in silence. Pause as needed to focus. As you arrive at the center, consider:

- Your personal definition of world peace
- What needs to be done to accomplish world peace
- As you walk out following the same path, consider what role you will play in seeking world peace