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Walk the labyrinth

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Walk the labyrinth

At Furman, people stroll around the lake and lie under shade trees to enjoy restful breaks from the busy pace of daily living.

From now on, to clear their minds and seek balance and insight, they may also be seen walking in circles.

With the addition of an outdoor labyrinth behind the Charles E. Daniel Chapel, students, faculty, staff and community members have access to a new sacred space, designed to provide opportunities to relax and meditate.

Oftentimes, labyrinths evoke images of huge mazes with tall hedge walls. But important distinctions set labyrinths and mazes apart.

Mazes, with wrong turns and dead ends, demand choices and create confusion. Labyrinths, on the other hand, guide us on a single path that coils to the center of the design. Upon reaching the center, we turn and follow the same path back out again. There is no “correct” way to walk a labyrinth; visitors set their own pace.

The origin of labyrinths remains a mystery, although archeologists have traced such patterns to prehistoric times. Ancient labyrinth symbols have been found on every continent and from cultures widely separated by time and space, but few records exist about their specific uses.

The labyrinth symbol seems to be so wedded to the very beginning of religious ritual that labyrinths have been called “divine imprints.” There is no question that they were important Christian symbols during the Middle Ages. As travel to the Holy Land became difficult for medieval Christians, large labyrinths were embedded in the floors of the naves of great European medieval cathedrals, offering symbolic pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The best-preserved labyrinth from this era lies in the stone floor of France’s Chartres Cathedral, which was completed in 1220.

The labyrinth at Furman is patterned after the medieval style. Its winding path provides a sacred space for thoughts and prayers to become conscious and deliberate.

The beauty of the labyrinth walk is that it is open to anyone on any spiritual path and from any religious tradition. Walking the labyrinth is a spiritual experience for some; for others it is a relaxing escape from everyday stress.

Furman opens path to relaxation and meditation



The labyrinth is a symbol open to our intentions, and each traveler brings different raw materials to the experience.

Many people appreciate the labyrinth as a metaphor for a journey, with twists, turns and a chance to share the experience with others. Some enter the labyrinth with a particular question in mind, or use the time to pray or focus on someone or something. Others simply look to the experience as a time of relaxation, discovery and openness.

The labyrinth walk is often seen as a threefold path: walk in, reach the center, walk out. As we walk in, we are invited to surrender our daily concerns and quiet ourselves. In the center we may find clarity, insight and wisdom. As we walk out, following the same path on which we entered, we move back into the world feeling centered, replenished and directed.

Many find that walking the labyrinth can be a transforming experience that unites contemplation and action. Some people experience healing, deeper self-knowledge and empowering creativity. Others say that they hear the voice of their own truth or feel a sense of guidance, grace or transcendence. Still others believe that they have touched the Divine.

Furman’s labyrinth was designed by landscape architect Randy Eggen-spiller at the behest of the university’s Center for Theological Exploration of Vocation and the Office of the Chaplains. Once the design was drawn, with a coiling walkway and inlaid bricks, the project came together like a jigsaw puzzle. One by one, the pieces fell into place.

Faculty, staff and students volunteered the labor required to lay out the labyrinth, and art professor Bob Chance designed and constructed an intricate mosaic tile for its center. The finished product was dedicated this spring.

The next time you come to campus, take a moment to stop behind the chapel and visit the labyrinth. Stand at the entrance; then take a deep breath, put one foot in front of the other, and experience the journey.

— Lindley Sharp '04

The author, who interned with the Center for Theological Exploration of Vocation in 2004-05, is now enrolled in a dual Master of Divinity/Master of Social Work program at Duke University Divinity School and the University of North Carolina School of Social Work.