

Get Outdoors and Walk the Healing Path of

LABYRINTHS

BY SUE MAYFIELD GEIGER

People say that walking on water is a miracle, but to me, walking peacefully on the Earth, is the real miracle.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

The Sylvan Rodriguez Park (named after distinguished journalist Sylvan Rodriguez who resided in the Clear Lake area) is designed with an aeronautical and archaeoastronomy theme. The circular forms of the parking lot and plaza are aligned with the crescent lake on a north-south axis. As a connection to prehistoric astronomers, stone portals viewed from the plaza's center mark the points where the sun appears on the winter and summer solstices. A spiral labyrinth in the plaza represents the order of the cosmos, and around it are 13 trees, representing the 13 lunar cycles per year.

Since the park's inception, many park goers have enjoyed a jogging trail, the picnic pavilion, practice and lacrosse fields, as well as a rocket-themed playground. Many have also been intrigued by the spiral labyrinth; several have walked it, yet few have truly understood its meaning.

Aside from a multitude of churches worldwide—parks, healthcare facilities, college campuses, retreat centers, spas, and even private residences are just a few of the places where labyrinths can be found.

"A labyrinth is a path that has been used by people of many different cultures over the centuries to find focus in life and grow closer to that which we call God," explains Rev. Gail Williford of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Houston.



It is an invitation one receives to slow down and go within to a place where science and technology end; a place where one has access to their "inner healer," and the return to wellbeing. It is a place to reflect, feel at peace, meditate, and pamper one's soul.

Due to its ever-winding, spiral design, labyrinths offer a centering point of sorts. Having been around for over 4000 years, they have been an integral part of many cultures such as Native American, Greek, Celtic and Mayan. The Hopi called the labyrinth the symbol for "mother earth."

There are various labyrinth designs, the most common ones being 11-circuit and 7-circuit. The Sylvan Rodriguez labyrinth is fashioned after the 11-circuit medieval design at Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France.

A labyrinth is not to be confused with a maze. A maze gives you choices throughout your journey, whereas when encountering a labyrinth, there is only one way in and that way is the same way out.

As for the national attention that labyrinths have garnered in the last



several years, we owe it all to Dr. Lauren Artress, who in 1996 founded the non-profit, Veriditas, to “pepper the planet with labyrinths.” With over 3500 labyrinth sites in the U.S. alone, her work has embraced the vision to activate and transform the human spirit through the labyrinth experience. Artress is a priest of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, California, and the author of *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*.

As you discover the great outdoors this month, find a labyrinth near you and give it a try. Before you begin, stand at the entrance and clear your mind, take a few deep breaths and concentrate on the natural setting around you. Walk slowly along the path and just feel the warmth of the day, making this your very own experience. You will encounter twists and turns, but the long continuous path will take you to the center. You may wish to focus on gratitude or forgiveness



or seek clarity about something bothering you. Walk with purpose and when you arrive at the center, pause for a while to meditate. As you make your exit, be at peace, reflect back on your journey and remember how it made you feel.



Below is a partial list of local labyrinths and others that are farther away, but worth the drive. Most are public; a few are private.

Sylvan Rodriguez Park
1201 Clear Lake City Blvd., Houston, TX

As explained above, this 11-circuit labyrinth is akin to the one at Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France. It sits next to a lake and walking path.

Rotary Labyrinth and Meditation Garden
William Temple Episcopal Center - UTMB
427 Market Street, Galveston, TX

Also a replica of the Chartres design in France, this labyrinth represents “a marriage of the medical field and human spiritual needs,” and caters to the spiritual needs of medical students, UTMB faculty and hospital patients, and all who wish to walk its path.



St. Luke’s United Methodist Church
3471 Westheimer, Houston, TX

After years of utilizing a canvas labyrinth on the gym floor, St. Paul’s now has its own outdoor labyrinth constructed with pavers on a concrete base on the lawn of the church between the Christ statue and the entrance to the building. The design replicates the labyrinth of Chartres

and is open from noon until 10 p.m. daily.

Covenant Church Labyrinth
4949 Caroline Street, Houston, TX

Made with crushed granite and pavers, this outdoor 50-foot Chartres type labyrinth is open 24 hours a day. It “meets you where you are, and gives you what you need,” is Covenant’s motto and they welcome all to come and experience this powerful spiritual tool.

University of St. Thomas
Chapel of St. Basil
1180 West Alabama, Houston, TX

Surrounded by plants and shrubs, lined with crepe myrtles, this Chartres labyrinth has a gravel path and is the focal point of a prayer garden amidst fountains and benches.

The Natural Gardener
8648 Old Bee Cave Road, Austin, TX

Lovely garden areas demonstrate organics at work that include butterfly and herb gardens, vegetable gardens, orchards and vineyards, a tea brew house, and a 7-circuit labyrinth made of granite and Berkeley Sedge grass.

The Margaret Austin Center
6650 Trackside Rd., Chappell Hill, TX

Set in a wooded, rural setting this facility contains a 7-circuit labyrinth, and is also a retreat center with overnight accommodations. They also allow tent camping.

Labyrinth of the Lake
1885 FM 2673, #107, Canyon Lake, TX

This Chartres labyrinth was created for those seeking a quiet walk against the blue waters of Canyon Lake. You must contact the owner if this is your first time to walk it at rebeccarodriguez333@yahoo.com. Hospice bereavement coordinators often bring grieving survivors to come and walk in silence.

Chandor Gardens
711 West Lee Ave., Weatherford, TX

A unique world-class garden paradise designed and created by renowned English portrait artist Douglas Chandor, the labyrinth is fabricated from antique Thurber bricks. Crushed granite forms the path. This labyrinth is different from traditional labyrinths with asymmetrical and compositional aspects.

Arts in Medicine
Texas Children’s Hospital, Houston, TX

The Arts in Medicine Program provides insight on the use of labyrinths and healing gardens for patients, families, and visitors at the Texas Children’s Hospital. Finger labyrinths have been used in the past with cancer patients, allowing the children to reflect on their thoughts through artistic expression. Arts in Medicine will soon utilize these finger labyrinths with cardiology patients as they have found them to be an amazing tool for reflection, creativity and self-discovery. Both the walking of the labyrinth and the reflection through artwork has led many pediatric patients and their families through an often difficult period in their lives.