



The Chapel Door

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Labyrinth or Maze?

When one first thinks of a labyrinth, they might first think of what we call a maze, those tortuous puzzles, done in pencil or walked, that purposely lead us astray and tempt us into dead ends. But, a labyrinth is nothing like a maze. A labyrinth has one path into the center and the same path back out. Walking a labyrinth can be a calming, spiritual experience as opposed to aggravations brought on by a maze.

The Junior Class is investigating the possibility of building a labyrinth on campus. A group of students and the seminary chaplain went on a labyrinth walk this fall. The stories of their experiences are the focus of this edition of *The Chapel Door*. May you be encouraged to do a labyrinth walk someday as a result of their sharing. *Ed.*

I had heard and read about Labyrinths for many years, but never had the occasion to walk one until our trip in November 2003. I was somewhat surprised at the contemplation I began doing as I walked, one foot in front of the other, slowly and deliberately down the path. I found myself, after a short time of walking, drifting back in my memory to when I was a child. I thought about those in my family who were near and dear to me as a child, even reviewed some detailed events I hadn't thought about before. The labyrinth seemed to be a quiet and holy place, filled with

people, yet there was an aloneness and stillness present within me. I came away feeling nurtured and renewed. I would like very much to have a place here on campus, where not only myself, but others would also experience the calming and renewing the labyrinth walk provides.

Brenda Ferree, 1st Year MDiv

All aspects of the Bon Secours fall outing sounded good, but I admit the opportunity to walk a labyrinth was the real draw for me. The IN-KY candidacy retreats have been held in places with labyrinths. So, in the previous two years, I experienced labyrinth walks in the fall. In merely two years I began what I hope will be an annual fall tradition - prior to that I had never walked a labyrinth. My prior walks were in a pastoral setting - out in a monastery's field or behind the nuns' apartment building. The walks were grassy and walking without shoes was encouraged. Often times I walked it by myself. Bon Secours was a paved walk in a beautiful wooded area; it was too cold to shed the shoes; and there were many people, a few kids and even an animal that accompanied me. I'll admit I prefer a more solitary walk.

Labyrinth walking is hard to describe because it is a meditation and/or spiritual exercise that should be experienced. As with any other spiritual discipline, it varies with the person and the atmosphere. At Bon Secours, I prayed and tried to "empty myself" before I entered; more prayers and meditation during the walk in; prayers at

the center and attempts to refocus so that the distractions around me could be filtered out; and prayers for my sister all the way out. Afterward, quiet time sitting outside the labyrinth to invite the Holy Spirit into my heart, to thank God for the experience, and to just "be still" and know that God is God. Sometimes I slowed down, sometimes I walked briskly. The twists and turns can be comforting; they can represent reminders for new prayers; they can eventually create a trance-like state. When you share the space with others (as at Bon Secours), it is important to stay in the present enough to avoid bumping into them. . . In one past experience, I recall literally "romping" through the grassy twists and turns due to feelings of joy and happiness! So, even in three short years, my labyrinth experiences have been quite varied.

Our beautiful pastoral and historically significant setting could provide a year-round opportunity for this unique and ancient spiritual discipline. Our LTSG community, Gettysburg, and all of the many visitors that come to The Ridge could have a place where "emptying out" and "filling up" have absolutely nothing to do with cars, gas, books, battles, or schedules, but everything to do with the blessed Three in One.

Betty Landis, 3rd Year MDiv

While I had walked labyrinths several times before, this visit was the most rewarding one. In part, I think, it was because I had done a bit of preparation. I had decided on topics to be thankful for on my way in and to pray for on my way out, linked to the direction I'd be facing. When walking east, I prayed about the seminary; when west about my wife; when south about the government; when north about my family of origin. This provided just enough focus -- I was surprised how many things occurred to

me, and what rich connections appeared when turning. I was also surprised how easy it was to fade in and out of that discipline, when other matters occurred to me.

It was also the first time I walked a labyrinth with anyone else on it. I was struck, while walking, at the dance we had, walking closer and then further away from one another. This dance was even more obvious when I sat outside the labyrinth and watched others.

Most of all, I was struck by both how leisurely the walking was -- I seemed to have infinite time available for this meditative sauntering -- and how quickly I seemed to get to the center and to the outside. For an easily distracted person, it was a fine match of the physical and spiritual, a delightful time apart.

Mark Oldenburg, Professor of Liturgics and Chaplain

Friends Along the Way

My favorite thing about the labyrinth is how it makes me feel connected to everyone I have ever known and everyone I will ever meet. Entering the labyrinth you head out on your own journey, onto your own path. You enter the labyrinth, follow the path to the center, and then you head back out on the same path you came in on. So, depending on which way you are going, you pass people that are either on their way to or from the center.

As you walk the labyrinth there are people at different points in their journey, maybe you know some of them, or maybe you do not. Every once in awhile you run head on into someone and then there is a decision to make. It's funny to see what will happen at this encounter. Will you have to get totally off? Will they step off before you get too close? Or, will you both step off together

and then continue going your opposite directions.

As you walk, there are people on your left or right. They may be 10 steps ahead, approaching the center, just entering, or on their way out, but wherever they are on their journey, they may intercept or parallel your journey.

I like to walk a labyrinth with friends and strangers. I like to sit on the outside and watch others, noticing how they pass and intercept one another.

As I walk the labyrinth I remember people that I have known in my life. I never know who I will remember along the way. Sometimes I take people with me, like my brother or grandmother, and sometimes memories join me as I walk along, often of someone I hadn't thought about in a long time. As I pass other people that are walking on different sections of the labyrinth I smile, because I am reminded of God's gift of love, and how love is passed through the friends we meet along the way.

Alena Lamirato, 1st Year MDiv

The labyrinth walk was a place to become more connected and centered. It was also a place of great peace. I felt a connection with the other people who walked it that day. Even though I was often going a different direction, it felt right that I should be traveling my path alone. At the same time, I knew I was in the company of others, we were just traveling on our own path.

Judy Clark, M.Ed., Special Student - United Church of Christ

Going into my first labyrinth experience, I really had no idea what to expect. As I

prepared to walk the labyrinth, I was unsure of what I would pray for, or even how to start. However, as I approached the entrance to the labyrinth, I made a conscious effort to let my mind go blank to see what would come. As I crossed the threshold of the labyrinth, I suddenly had a very clear idea of what the topic of this conversation with God needed to be. Proceeding slowly down the path, I began to pray about a topic I had been avoiding for some time. The tone of the prayer was intimate, conversational, familiar. As I traversed the circuitous route, now towards the center, now away from it, distractions seemed to fade away and my mind focused entirely on my prayer. At one point, I felt as though the topic I was praying on had been exhausted. Within a few steps, I found that it was not, and continued praying. A few minutes later, as my prayer tapered off again, I found myself standing at the middle of the labyrinth. As I paused at the center, looking around at my surroundings, I felt totally relaxed and comfortable, wholly at peace.

After standing for a bit at the center, I turned and began making my way back out of the labyrinth. Without much thinking about it, I began to pray on a topic that was, in a way, the obverse of my prayer on the way in. As I made my way back down the path, I was occasionally aware of passing others. These encounters made only faint impressions, however, as my mind continued to focus on my conversation with God. Suddenly, without quite knowing how, I found myself back at the entrance. As I stepped out of the labyrinth, I once again felt totally at peace with myself and with God. I felt, and still feel, as though the labyrinth played an important role in helping me to focus sufficiently to do something I needed, but didn't necessarily want, to do.

Bob Ierien, Senior MDiv

Poetry Corner

The Enunciation

Hail, sunbeam, full of rays!

I feel like Gabriel;

I name thee.

I don't call you into existence:

I lack such power, but

I name thee.

Would I know you without a name?

I would feel warmth,

but never know the warmer.

Yet now with your name...

I conceive.

You are born to me,

and your name shall be sunlight.

Sun:

I know where you came from,

that you left your home in the heavens.

Light:

You ceased be known as hydrogen.

$$E=MC^2$$

You became other

so that you might visit me here.

I also know—

because I know your name—

that you are still in some sense hydrogen.

$$MC^2=E$$

Warm upon my aging skin,
less pliant than it was at 25,
less brittle than it will be at 80,

I contemplate you:

Back and forth forever:

Wave and particle,

$$E=MC^2$$

communicatio idiomatum.

I wonder that...

I am,

you are.

How can this be?

The Lord is with me.

Brett Jenkins, Senior MDiv

Reflections on J-Term

For anyone interested in learning the Spanish language, I highly recommend an immersion program. My J-Term was spent in Cuernavaca, Mexico. For four weeks, I lived with a Mexican family and spent my weekdays at Universidad Internacional, where the English language is kept to a minimum.

Living with a Mexican family is optional, but for me it was one of the most important parts of the experience. Mexican people are warm and welcoming, and they truly do make you feel like an adopted member of the family while you are there. If you are watching your weight, beware! The home cooking is superb and there is always plenty of food.

The school offers optional excursions throughout the week and on weekends. Doing the excursions is a wonderful way to become acquainted with Mexican culture and history. The guides are normally

Spanish-speaking, further adding to practice of the language. A sampling of the many options would include: The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Teotihuacan and the pyramids of the sun and moon, and Taxco, a silver mining village.

Spanish classes at the school are conducted in groups of no more than five people. This allows for individual attention and facilitates conversation. In addition to the basic Spanish, other class options allow students to tailor their schedules to suit their interests. For example, salsa dancing lessons, Mexican cooking classes, or useful conversation application such as taking a taxi or renting a hotel room might be part of your studies.

Fees for the program are very reasonable. I made all my arrangements through the National Registration Center for Studies Abroad. Their web address is www.nrcsa.com. They provide information on several language schools, so all interested students are sure to find one to their liking.

Kathi Storey, 2nd Year MAMS-C

The Passion

Like it or hate it, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* has provoked many discussions around the water cooler in both the sacred and secular world. If you have any thoughts that you would like to share with the community regarding this movie, please submit them for possible publication in a future issue of *The Chapel Door*. Please send submissions to the editor at dsnyder@ltsg.edu. *Ed.*

Odds and Ends

The Chapel Door is a student publication published under the auspices of the Publication Division of the Student Association of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Submissions of articles, letters, poems, artwork and cartoons from students, faculty and staff are encouraged. Submissions can be sent to the editor at dsnyder@ltsg.edu. *The Chapel Door* is published on an occasional basis as submitted content permits. *Ed.*