

## Evoking the Sacred by Walking a Labyrinth

By Deidree Ann Curci

*Nearly 15 years ago I attended a women's retreat weekend organized by Kay Eaton and CeCe Miller, the founders of Sacred Space. It was twilight on a cold fall evening when I entered the 189-year-old town-hall on Kelley's Island. A cloth replication of the Chartres Labyrinth was spread out, nearly taking up the entire well-worn wooden floor. Candles twinkled around the perimeter and the inviting sounds of gentile music lingered in the background. After a brief introduction of how to walk the labyrinth, the 30 women, many of us experiencing this ancient practice for the first time, began our walks.*

*I watched as the first souls entered, aware of their movement into a space of release and trust. Slowly they made their way into this ancient tool for stilling the mind and entering the heart. As more and more women entered, some would move aside to make way for others whose footfalls were returning from the center; others moved past those whose steps were slower and more measured. I was deeply moved by the experience, both outwardly by the sway of the forms and inwardly by awareness that this ancient ritual was much bigger than me. Yet somehow it mattered to the whole that I awaken to my unique purpose and witness in this earthly dwelling.*

Labyrinths, unlike mazes, have one entrance with one path that leads to the center, often quite circuitously. Dating back to pre-Christian times, images of the Seven-Circuit Labyrinth (fig.1) were found inscribed in coins on the Island of Crete. This design was also used by Hopi Indians of North America. Another often seen and replicated labyrinth design is the "Chartres" (fig. 2), which dates back to 1200 A.D. The Chartres Labyrinth derives its name from its location in the ancient Cathedral of Chartres, in Chartres, France. This labyrinth often was used by Christians who could not make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the center of their faith. Walking the labyrinth was a symbolic return to their center and a place of prayer and meditation. Many monasteries in Europe had a labyrinth in an inner courtyard that would be walked by the monks prior to offering liturgy. It was a way to still their minds and raise awareness to the sacred unfolding over which they were about to preside.



Figure 1 Chartres Labyrinth



Figure 2 Seven-Circuit Labyrinth

Perhaps no other person in recent times has been more instrumental in reawakening the awareness to labyrinths than Reverend Lauren Artress, author of the book *Walking A Sacred Path* and narrator of a video entitled *Rediscovering the Labyrinth*. According to the website of Grace Cathedral in San

Francisco, the video “tells the stories of real people whose lives have been changed by walking the labyrinth. From ancient origins to contemporary applications, the labyrinth is a crucible for change, a blueprint for the sacred meeting of psyche and soul, a field of light, a cosmic dance.”

The method for walking a labyrinth is simple. The walker follows the path that leads into the center, and then often spends some time there. When ready, the walker follows the same path out again. Sometimes there is an awareness of stages in this walking: releasing (the walk to the center, receiving (being still in the center) and union/transformation (the return walk from the center).

Each person who walks a labyrinth may find a different experience in this ancient ritual. Some are hungry for knowing the depth of who they are and the purpose that lay beyond their daily tasks. Others seek ways to be a peaceful people. The ancient walk provides a place to begin to hope. The walker’s footsteps within the spiral meet the footsteps of all those who have gone before, and in walking, an invitation is extended for opening of the portal of wisdom and healing.

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*Dee Curci is the co-founder of The Blessed Foundation. Her retreat center in Medina has two labyrinths; a replication of the Chartres Labyrinth and The Labyrinth of the Heart. Dee has created a new program entitled Spirit-Jewelality and Humanity, Connecting the Journey of Living into Dying® with LifeBook®. Her website is located at [www.blessed-foundation.com](http://www.blessed-foundation.com), and she can be reached by emailing [DeeCurci@Blessed-Foundation.com](mailto:DeeCurci@Blessed-Foundation.com)*

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Sacred Space Website: (<http://www.sacredspacecleveland.org/spiritoflifepperforming.html>)

Grace Cathedral Website: (<http://www.gracecathedral.org/visit/labyrinth/>)