

The Labyrinth

Caroline Lundy is a Veriditas-trained labyrinth facilitator. A former catechist and second-level school principal, she is currently enjoying retirement and exploring the labyrinth.

Since the early 90s there has been a resurgence of interest in the labyrinth as a prayerful path for embodied meditation. This was largely due to the inspiration and exploration of Rev Dr Lauren Artress, Canon for Special Ministries at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral and founder of Veriditas. Especially in times of restricted travel and thus limited access to sacred sites and places of pilgrimage, the labyrinth is re-emerging as a metaphor for the spiritual journey.

Walking the labyrinth can be a practice common to all faiths and none. The spiritual reality is ours to experience. The great cathedrals of Europe during the middle ages had labyrinths, with the most famous being the 800-year-old stonework labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral, south of Paris. It is thought that people who could not afford to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land used these labyrinths as symbolic representations of the journey, like the Stations of the Cross, walking barefoot, some even 'journeying' on their knees. Those of us who have completed the Lough Derg pilgrimage will recall the barefoot circling of the stony,



The Manresa Labyrinth

penitential 'beds', and the feeling of connection to the pilgrims from centuries before and to the historic practice of embodied prayer.

The labyrinth pattern is different to that of a maze, in that there are no dead ends in the labyrinth, you cannot get lost! There is one path and it leads to the centre and back out again. There is no confusion or questioning of getting stuck, there is space for simply 'being'. The image of the labyrinth's unicursal path unfolds before us and beckons to us to take some time from the business of our lives in order to come to stillness, prayer and contemplation. Walking the labyrinth prayerfully assists us to make a spiritual journey and to rest in



Photo: Piaras Jackson SJ

the presence of the Spirit at its centre before journeying back to our busy lives, refreshed and renewed.

Dr Artress modelled her method of walking the labyrinth prayerfully upon the teachings of St John of the Cross in the *Three Ways of the Mystical Path: Purgation, Illumination and Union*. As with any journey or pilgrimage we prepare for and then travel, we arrive and experience, and finally we leave and journey back home, thinking about what we just experienced. We can pray for a particular intention, person or outcome at the beginning of a labyrinth walk. We can express gratitude on the way back from the centre, or we can simply 'rest' in the peacefulness of those moments. It is always

helpful to reflect upon our blessings as opposed to our crosses, and certainly during these worrying times, that is a challenge we are facing right now.

John O'Donohue, the Irish poet and scholar, captured this perfectly in *Anam Cara* when he wrote: 'you do not have to go away outside yourself to come into real conversation with your soul and with the mysteries of the spiritual world. The eternal is at home – within you ... there is a labyrinth within the soul'. Why not explore the labyrinth as a much-needed walking meditation that has been reintroduced back into the Christian tradition? It can offer a 'spiritual exercise that becomes the path of life ... it allows the wandering soul to find a way to the centre, to find a way home'.

Currently in Ireland there are more than thirty-four labyrinths. When you can travel, you will find one in:

- Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, Co. Dublin
- An Tobar, Spiritan Retreat House, Ardracran, Co. Meath.
- Dublin City University and Christ Church Cathedral, Co. Dublin.
- Glendalough Visitor's Centre, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow.
- St Fin Barre's Cathedral Cork, Co. Cork.
- Glone Mill Follain Art Centre, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo.

Further information can be found at www.labyrinthlocator.com, www.labyrinthssociety.org and www.veriditas.org You can also download a free app, 'Labyrinth Journey' which is a virtual labyrinth walk. 