

# WESTMINSTER WOODS

*Welcome to The Labyrinth*

## **WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?**

The labyrinth is a tool used for the spiritual practices of meditation, prayer and reflection. It represents the path of life, and those who walk it will find themselves walking a winding path toward the center and back out again. The journey historically has represented a pilgrim's journey with God and is a symbolic walk for reflection and meditation.

Various forms of the labyrinth can be found in religious traditions around the world, and it is generally used as a ritual to provide the opportunity to grow in understanding, wisdom and courage with facing challenges of daily life.

The walking of the labyrinth is meant to symbolize a mirror of our lives, to provide insights one might be needing or seeking. It is not a maze meant to trick or confuse, as there is only one path to the center and then back to the beginning. And there is no wrong way to walk the labyrinth, though it should be done with an open heart and mind.

There are many different types of labyrinths, and they can be found in many places, from simple stone or grass creations at camps, parks or in household gardens to beautiful and ornate permanent structures in the floors of churches and cathedrals around the world. There are organizations and websites dedicated to locating labyrinths open to the public. (For example: [labyrinthsociety.org](http://labyrinthsociety.org).)

## **THE HISTORY OF THE LABYRINTH**

Throughout history there has been the practice of making spiritual pilgrimages, and the labyrinth is one such tool for this practice. It came about during the Middle Ages when Christians were encouraged to travel to the Holy Land at least one time in their lives.

As travel during the Crusades became too dangerous, some cathedrals throughout Europe were designated as "pilgrimage cathedrals" where labyrinths were created in the stone floors. Christians could then journey to these sites to complete their symbolic pilgrimage in the form of these labyrinth prayer walks.

## **THE LABYRINTH AT WESTMINSTER WOODS**

Westminster Woods is home to a serenely beautiful outdoor labyrinth surrounded by the majestic coastal redwoods.

The labyrinth was installed in June 2003 by STEP, the high school leadership camp at the time, as a training on the art of contemplative prayer. It is made of redwood duff and river rock from our local Dutch Bill Creek.

The labyrinth is located across the creek from our Big Green Field and pool area. It may be reached by walking along the trail next to the Bridge House garage area or by crossing the footbridge across from the Redwood Grove and following the trail to the right along the creek bank. (See map on the back. Full camp maps are available from the office.)

We welcome you to explore this labyrinth and hope that it will be a tool for peace, insight, meditation, and celebration along your life journey.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR WALKING THE LABYRINTH

Walking the labyrinth is your own individual journey. To begin, stand just outside the entrance of the labyrinth and prepare yourself by quieting your mind and clearing your thoughts to increase awareness of your breathing. It may help to concentrate for a moment on your current concerns and worries that you would like to process throughout your walk. You may also choose to say a prayer before you begin.

Once you begin your journey, find your own pace. There is no need to rush. An average walk can take 20-30 minutes.

Remember that the labyrinth is a two-way street. If there are others walking the labyrinth at the same time, you may pass or let others step around you. It is important for all those participating in the labyrinth walk to be considerate of each other's space and need for silence.

Once you reach the center, stay as long as you like before journeying along the same path back to the beginning. This can be a time to let go of the concerns and burdens you may have been processing on the journey inward.

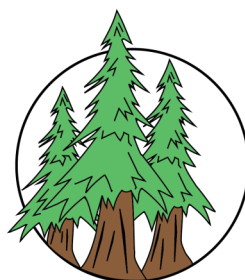
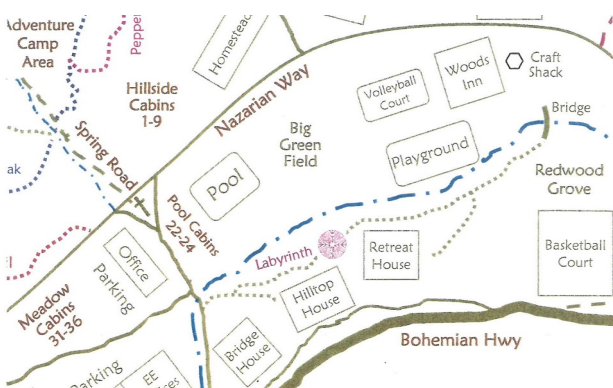
Each time one walks the labyrinth can be a different experience. You may find peace, clarity, strength, solace, release, and a deep sense of joy. When walked with a community of people, this can be a shared journey, an activity for groups to do together to encourage shared vision and community.

These are three stages that can be a helpful guide to your journey through the labyrinth:

**RELEASING** (Purgation) - letting go of the details of daily life as you walk into the labyrinth; this is the time to open your heart and quiet your mind.

**RECEIVING** (Illumination) - opening to insight & new awareness as you near or sit/stand in the center, allowing yourself to receive guidance.

**RETURNING** (Union) - leaving the center by following the same path back out, taking the silence and peace and insight with you into your day.



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