

WHEN JUDY HUGHES attended a women's retreat in the early '90s, she was looking for inspiration. Instructed to walk a labyrinth, a winding path with no dead ends, she had no idea what to expect. "The organizers had constructed the labyrinth from clothesline, and all I could think was "What is this?" Hughes put her doubts on hold, and walked its circular route. The results, as she recalls, were amazing. "By the time I had finished walking the labyrinth, I felt calm and peaceful. I felt really attuned to this spiritual exercise."

So attuned that Hughes, a marriage and family therapist who lives and works in Livermore, approached the Livermore-based First Presbyterian Church's key staff with the idea of building a labyrinth on their church property. As Hughes tells it, their initial response was underwhelming. "The church was in the throes of renovation, their construction budget was tight, and the labyrinth concept was alien to them," she explains.

Hughes eventually prevailed, finding a strategy that would pay the \$20,000 needed to build the labyrinth. "We sold memorial bricks that commemorate the donors," she says. The First Presbyterian Church's outdoor labyrinth, measuring forty-two feet in diameter, and designed by master labyrinth-maker Robert Ferré, is based on the same medieval design that graces the floors of such renowned churches as the Chartres Cathedral in France and San Francisco's Grace Cathedral. Installed in 2005, it is one of several publicly-accessible labyrinths located in the Valley (see below for more information).

No Right Way

Labyrinths contain circles, referred to as circuits, and most commonly use one of three basic designs that contain seven, eleven, or twelve circuits. Spiritualists walk the circuits until they reach the center of the labyrinth. They then retrace their steps back to the source, the labyrinth's entrance. Letting one's mind wander along with their feet is encouraged. There is no right way, says Reverend Steve Harms, pastor of Danville-based Peace Lutheran Church.

"You can walk with an intention or without one," says Rev. Harms. "Sometimes people use a mantra as they walk. Others may focus on the three stages of cleansing, uniting, and integrating that are often associated with the labyrinth ritual. In other words, moving towards the center of the labyrinth can be a time for releasing thoughts and quieting the mind. At the center, you may pause and receive inspiration. On the return trip, you may seek integration with the larger labyrinth, which is the world we live in."

Retracing History

Labyrinths can be found in various sizes, both indoor and outdoors, and fashioned of a variety of materials, including concrete, fabric, stone, turf, or sand. Wherever you find one and walk its path, know that you will be part of a historic tradition that stretches back over four thousand years, a shared legacy of Native American, Greek, Celtic, Mayan, and Roman cultures. And whenever you take the time to enter its circuits, know that there are many others like yourself throughout the world doing so as well, for release, reflection, or simply a momentary refuge from the busy world. *VLM*

PHOTO: FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF LIVERMORE



WHERE TO WALK

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF LIVERMORE

2020 Fifth St., Livermore
(925) 447-2078
FPC-Livermore.org
Open: Weekdays, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.;
Sundays 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Where: The central courtyard
Special events: A candlelit
labyrinth walk the third Friday of
every month.

PEACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

3201 Camino Tassajara, Danville
(925) 648-7000
PeaceJourney.org/Labyrinth
Open: 24-hour, lit from dusk to
midnight for night walkers
Where: In the courtyard at the
north end of the sanctuary
Special events: A quarterly
candlelit labyrinth walk, held
to acknowledge the equinox and
solstice seasons, that also features
guest musicians and artists.

ST. TIMOTHY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

1550 Diablo Rd., Danville
(925) 837-4993
SaintTimothysDanville.org
Open: 24-hour
Where: On the east side of the
property, behind Grace House

VAL VISTA COMMUNITY PARK

7350 Johnson Dr., Pleasanton
(925) 931-5340
Cl.Pleasanton.Ca.us
Open: During park hours, from
dawn until dusk
Where: Labyrinth is located in
the park



Sacred Circuits

Labyrinths offer spiritual renewal for those willing to walk them with an open mind and an open heart

by PATRICIA KUTZA

The Labyrinth at the First Presbyterian Church of Livermore