

GOD IS IN THIS PLACE



The labyrinth on the Southridge Congregation grounds in Ridgefield, Washington, has been a gift to me for the past year.

I was a member of the first cohort of the Spiritual Formation and Companionship Program (SFCP), sponsored by Community of Christ. I enjoyed three years of delightful fellowship, meaningful connection, and learning. All encouraged me to grow spiritually. When we were given our assignment to propose a final project, I did not deliberate long. I wanted to immerse myself in a spiritual practice, so I envisioned the building of a labyrinth!

Throughout our program, I had learned many spiritual practices that strengthened and inspired the Spirit in my life. The purposeful prayer walk that a labyrinth offers is always, to me, the most meaningful, providing sacred space for meditation, reflection, and personal peace.

I envisioned a dream labyrinth outdoors, accessible at all times to everyone—Community of Christ members and the general community. An outdoor labyrinth, invitational in its very nature, encourages personal meditation time to nurture a spirit of peace. This invitation honors our church's objective of promoting peace in a very personal way.

One of our Enduring Principles, the Worth of All Persons, has always spoken to my heart. My dreams included making the labyrinth accessible to all, regardless of physical limitations.

There would be a path, easily navigated, to the labyrinth. The circuits would be wider than many labyrinths to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs, meeting requirements of the American with Disabilities Act.

Our community includes many people who are spiritual but not religious. A labyrinth provides hospitality and invitation to those spiritual seekers. Also, we know our youth and young adults often

seek to express spirituality in non-traditional ways. A labyrinth connects those of traditional faith and those who practice spirituality in more independent ways.

As President Steve Veazey shared in his September 2017 "A Time to Act!" address to the church:

The future church is being formed by a basic concept: Our chief purpose is to birth, nurture, and multiply communities of disciples and seekers engaged in spiritual formation and compassionate ministry and action. This basic blueprint—spiritual formation, community, compassionate ministry and action—is true to the vision of Christ.

I became a seeker of the Spirit throughout the SFCP. I discovered the Spirit is always waiting to greet, embrace, and strengthen me through many spiritual practices. I came to realize my everyday life holds many opportunities to encounter the Spirit, just by pausing and dwelling in the moment.

On one summer afternoon as I watered my garden, I spent minutes interacting with a hummingbird as he enjoyed the spray of my hose. This connection with God through the hummingbird humbled me and made me pause and rest in the Spirit.

Perhaps harnessing the energetic spirit of a hummingbird would have been easier than building a labyrinth. I never really intended to build it myself. I always figured someone else could realize my dream and build it. Then I would commit to walk it and share it with my community.

I'm blessed to be married to Dan Jackson, a professional accountant and—who knew?—someone capable of designing and building a labyrinth.

First, we needed to receive World Church approval. Another blessing is that Apostle Ron Harmon spoke

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for our project to those who needed to make the decision. Once we had World Church support, we brought the proposal to our congregation for its approval to use church property and funds.

In the beginning, Dan and I believed someone "out there" would prepare the ground and build the labyrinth for \$30,000. But soon we were confronted with more potential costs than the congregation could meet. Dan embraced the challenge.

Many hours of service were donated as the ground was prepared. A large, diseased oak needed to be cut down. Dan found some workers who bid low and tackled the job. It was so much more than they had anticipated, and late into the second night, Dan's truck headlights provided the light they needed to finish the job. The next day, they told Dan, "We prayed about this and decided this is a job that God wants us to do, so we are not going to charge you."

Dan thanked them, gave them the money due to them, and asked them to pay it forward, which they agreed to do. That was a reminder that God was directing many hearts and hands to complete this project.

Dan and Les Sundstrom, Dan's constant companion and helper, can testify that God was in this place. They worked throughout the spring and summer of 2019. Many wise people advised, "Do not plan a dedication service until the labyrinth is completely done." But for many reasons, we planned the service for September 8.

Saturday evening, September 7, found Dan and Les frantically putting the finishing touches on their work. And the labyrinth was ready Sunday evening.

David Brock, former presiding evangelist and my SFCP covenant leader, offered the blessing. Congregants, friends, and community members attended. All celebrated, although we needed to provide umbrellas for those who chose to walk the labyrinth in the rain.

When I go to walk, I often am accompanied or met by a member of the community or a deer from the nearby forest. God is in this place.

And now, when I am challenged with "social distancing," I often find myself driving to the labyrinth to walk. To perhaps greet a fellow sojourner on the path. I remember that, for me, this is the best spiritual

practice ever. And again, I'm reminded that God is in this place.

As I walk the labyrinth in these days of COVID-19, I know my prayers are heard, and I feel my spirit strengthened. With each step, I pray for wellness and healing in our world. I am grateful for this sacred space, where I can quiet my anxious thoughts and speak prayers of my heart.

The Spirit of God is always waiting to embrace us—especially during times of isolation, worry, and fear. This walk can reassure us. This walk can give us focus for where we are called to be. This walk can answer our questions. This walk can give us a time of just being with our God—away from worry, away from fear. God is in this place.

**'THE LABYRINTH IS AN
ANCIENT SYMBOL FOR A
SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.
ENTER AT YOUR OWN PACE
AND BRING WHATEVER IS IN
YOUR HEART.
FOLLOW THE PATH AROUND
TO THE CENTRE AND FOLLOW
THE SAME PATH OUT.
WALK INTENTIONALLY, FIND
YOUR NATURAL PACE AND
ALLOW EVERYTHING TO
BE A METAPHOR FOR YOUR
JOURNEY WITH THE SACRED.
AS YOU ENCOUNTER OTHERS
ON YOUR JOURNEY, FEEL FREE
TO PASS OR MAKE SPACE FOR
ONE ANOTHER AS NEEDED.
LET THE PATH LEAD YOU
BACK INTO THE WORLD
MAY YOU FIND HOPE, JOY,
LOVE AND PEACE ON YOUR
JOURNEY.'**