



# **THE LABYRINTH**

## **A Sacred Path**

**Episcopal Church of the Ascension  
Seneca, SC**



# Topics

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- Introduction
- History
- Some details
- Reflections
- The “Path” forward

# Introduction – 1

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- What is a labyrinth?
  - An ancient symbol that relates to wholeness, combining the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path.
  - Long used as meditation and prayer tools
  - A symbol that creates a sacred space and place.
  - A labyrinth is a right brain task.
    - It involves intuition, creativity, and imagery.
    - With a labyrinth there is only one choice to be made. The choice is to enter or not.
    - A more passive, receptive mindset is needed.
    - The choice is whether or not to walk a spiritual path.
  - At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey of life.
    - Joyous or somber, thoughtful or prayerful, a walking meditation

# Introduction – 2

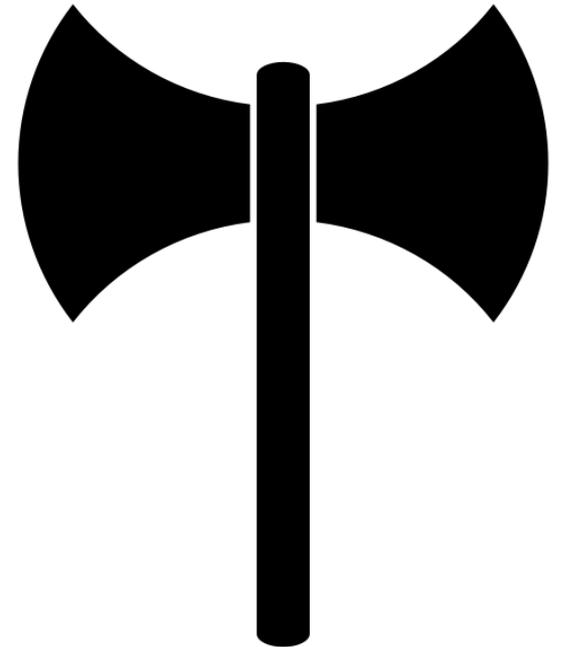
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- Some general guidelines for walking a labyrinth are:
  - Focus
    - Pause and wait at the entrance. Become quiet and centered. Give acknowledgment through a bow, nod, or other gesture and then enter.
  - Experience
    - Walk purposefully. Observe the process. When you reach the center, stay there and focus several moments. Leave when it seems appropriate. Be attentive on the way out.
  - Exit
    - Turn and face the entrance. Give an acknowledgement of ending, such as "Amen."
  - Reflect:
    - After walking the labyrinth reflect back on your experience.
  - Walk often

# History of the Labyrinth – Ancient

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"*Labyrinth*" is a word of pre-Greek origin that was absorbed by classical Greek. It is a combination of the [Lydian](#) word "[labrys](#)," meaning "double-edged axe" (a symbol of royal power), with *-inthos* meaning "place".



After he ascended the throne of Crete, Minos struggled with his brothers for the right to rule. Minos prayed to Poseidon to send him a snow-white bull, as a sign of approval. He was to sacrifice the bull in honor of Poseidon but decided to keep it instead. To punish Minos, Poseidon caused Pasiphaë, Minos' wife, to fall madly in love with the bull. She had Daedalus, the famous architect, make a wooden cow for her. Pasiphaë climbed into the decoy to seduce the white bull from the sea. Their offspring was called the Minotaur. The Minotaur, as the Greeks imagined him, had the body of a man and the head and tail of a bull. Minos had Daedalus construct a gigantic labyrinth to hold the Minotaur. Its location was near Minos' palace in Knossos. The Minotaur was slain by Theseus, an Athenian youth.



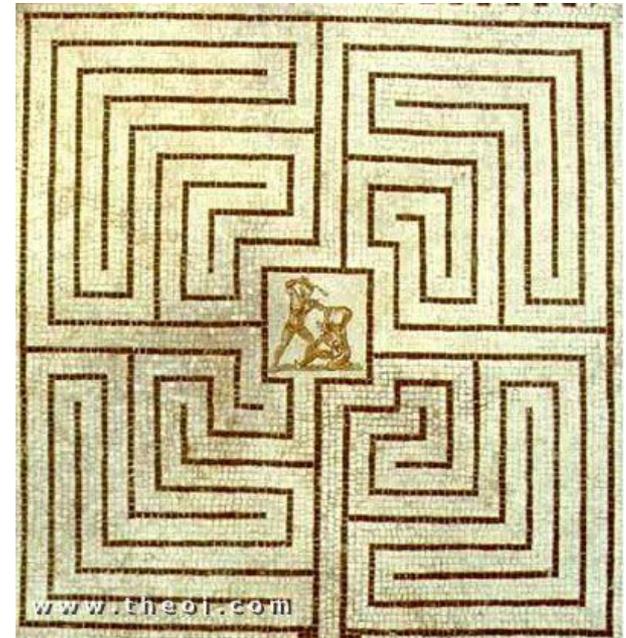


In the 3rd century BC, coins from Knossos were still struck with the labyrinth symbol. The predominant labyrinth form during this period is the simple 7-circuit style known as the classical or Cretan labyrinth.

The Romans adapted the ancient labyrinth symbol as a decorative mosaic floor patterns. Although Roman labyrinths look quite different from the older Cretan labyrinth design, many are actually simple extensions of the Cretan labyrinth into four square quadrants. An image of Theseus slaying the Minotaur is often seen in the central compartment.

Most Roman labyrinths were too small to have been walked, and are typically found on the floor near the entrances to houses and villas; many have small city walls (perhaps indicating the walls of Troy) drawn around them. This suggests they served a protective function, and were perhaps believed to have warded off evil influences or intruders.

There are over 60 known examples of Roman mosaic labyrinths, found throughout the Roman Empire at its height.



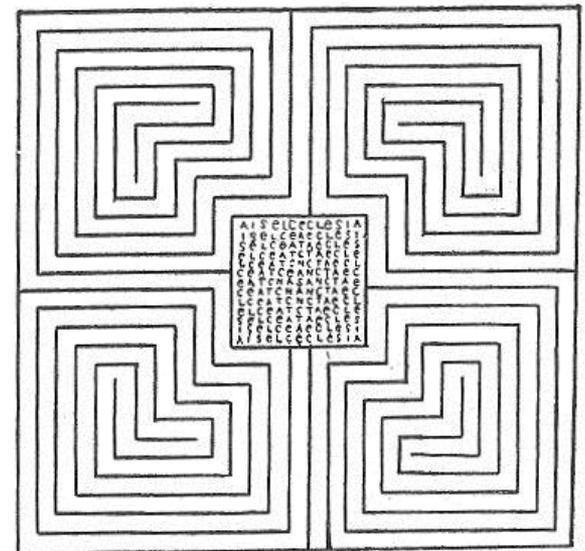
# History of the Labyrinth – Medieval

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Christian churches used the labyrinth for prayer and meditation as early as 350 AD. The oldest existing Christian labyrinth is the one in the 4th-century basilica of Reparatus, Orleansville, Algeria.

The labyrinth is in the pavement near the north-west entrance of the church. It measures about 8 ft. in diameter and shows great resemblance to the Roman pavements. At the centre is a *jeu-de-lettres* on the words SANCTA ECLESIA, which may be read in any direction, except diagonally, commencing at the centre.

But for the employment of these words, the labyrinth in question might well have been conceived to be a Roman relic used by the builders of the church to ornament their pavement.



The Christian artists and thinkers of early medieval times developed the Roman pattern into a new and beautiful form that was used as a feature in many medieval cathedrals. Its path was shaped like the Cross.

The labyrinth is divided neatly into four quarters around a cross, standing in the medieval mind for the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and also for the four stages of the Mass (Evangelium, Offertory, Consecration, and Communion). Labyrinth meditation might be based on one of these or some other set of four, assigning each quarter section to one, and so forth.

Use of these labyrinths flourished in Europe throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries and beyond, especially in the French cathedrals of Chartres, Sens, Poitiers, Bayeaux, Amiens, and Rheims and in the Italian cathedrals at Lucca and San Maria-di-Trastavera in Rome.





In Christian history and practice, the labyrinth is most famously associated with Chartres Cathedral in France, where an eleven-circuit labyrinth was inlaid into the floor of the sanctuary in the 13th century. It was used as a way of symbolically participating in the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Medieval pilgrims re-enacted this by following the path of the labyrinth in the cathedral on their knees. The center of the labyrinth probably represented for many pilgrims the Holy City itself and thus became the substitute goal of the journey.



But after medieval times the spiritual uses of labyrinths were forgotten, and they fell into disuse. Many were destroyed between the 17th and 19th centuries.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the labyrinth symbol, which has inspired a revival in labyrinth building, notably at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco.



# Labyrinths

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Some

Details

Details

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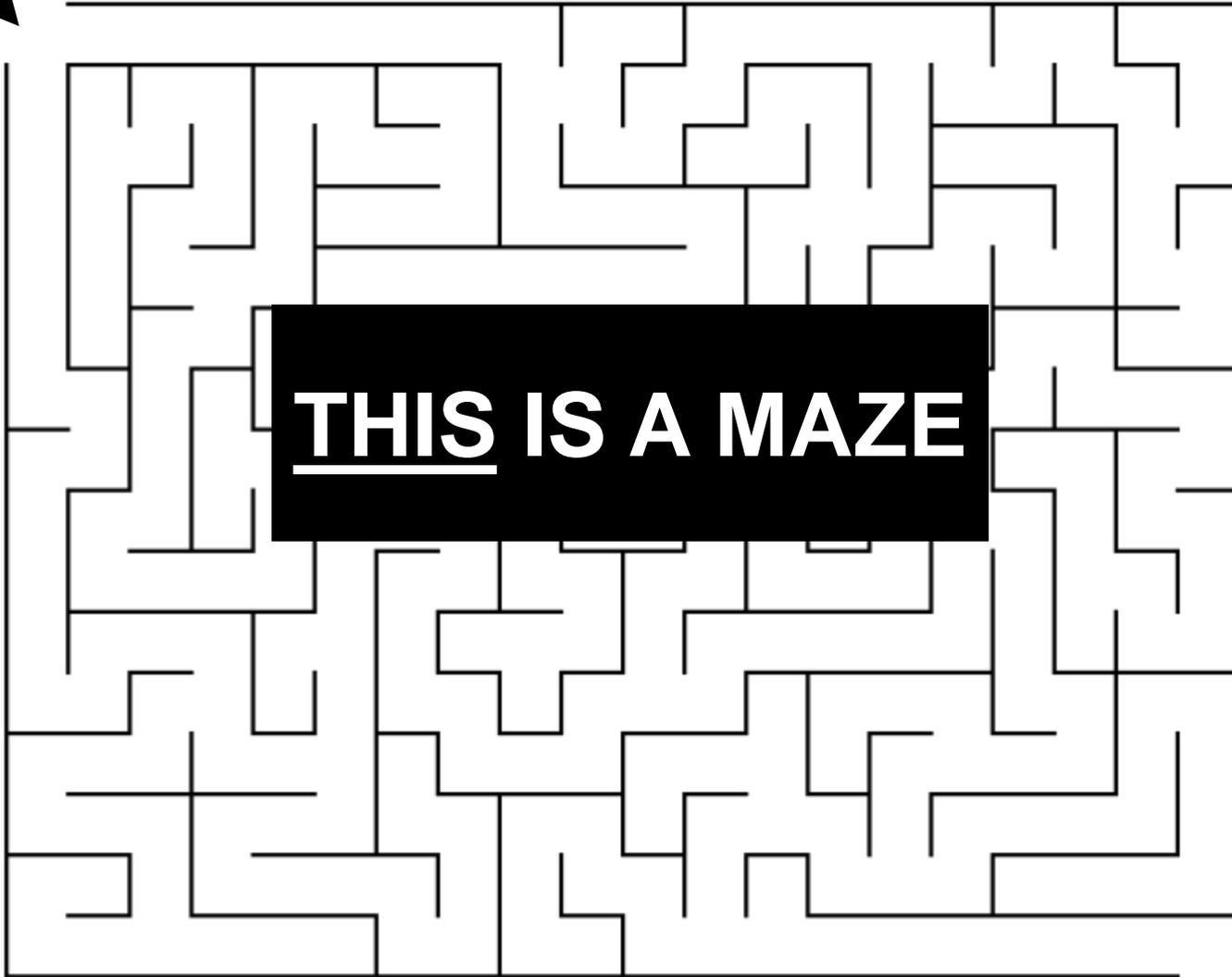
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THIS IS A MAZE

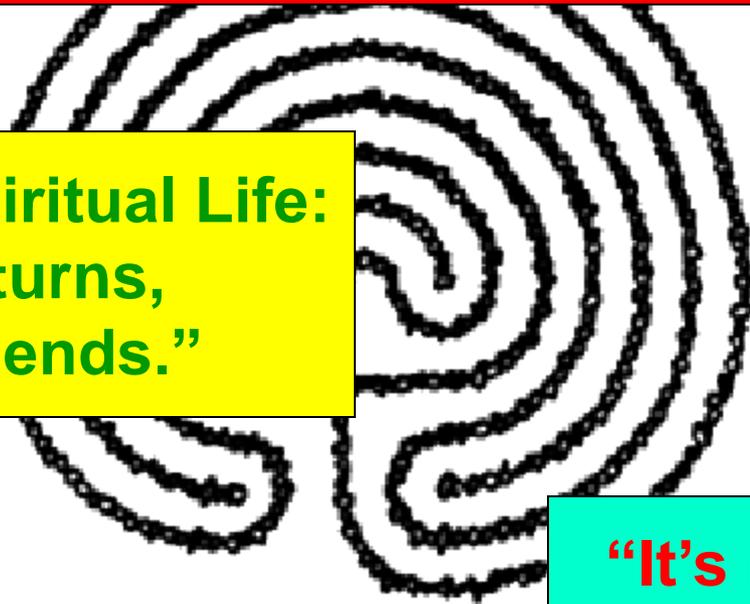
# **THIS IS A LABYRINTH**

**“To enter the labyrinth is to  
choose to walk a sacred path.”**

**The Rev Dr Lauren Artress**

**“Metaphor for Spiritual Life:  
Twists and turns,  
but no dead ends.”**

**“It’s not a spiral;  
it’s a WEAVE.”**









# SACRED GEOMETRY – 1

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## Chartres Eleven Circuit Labyrinth

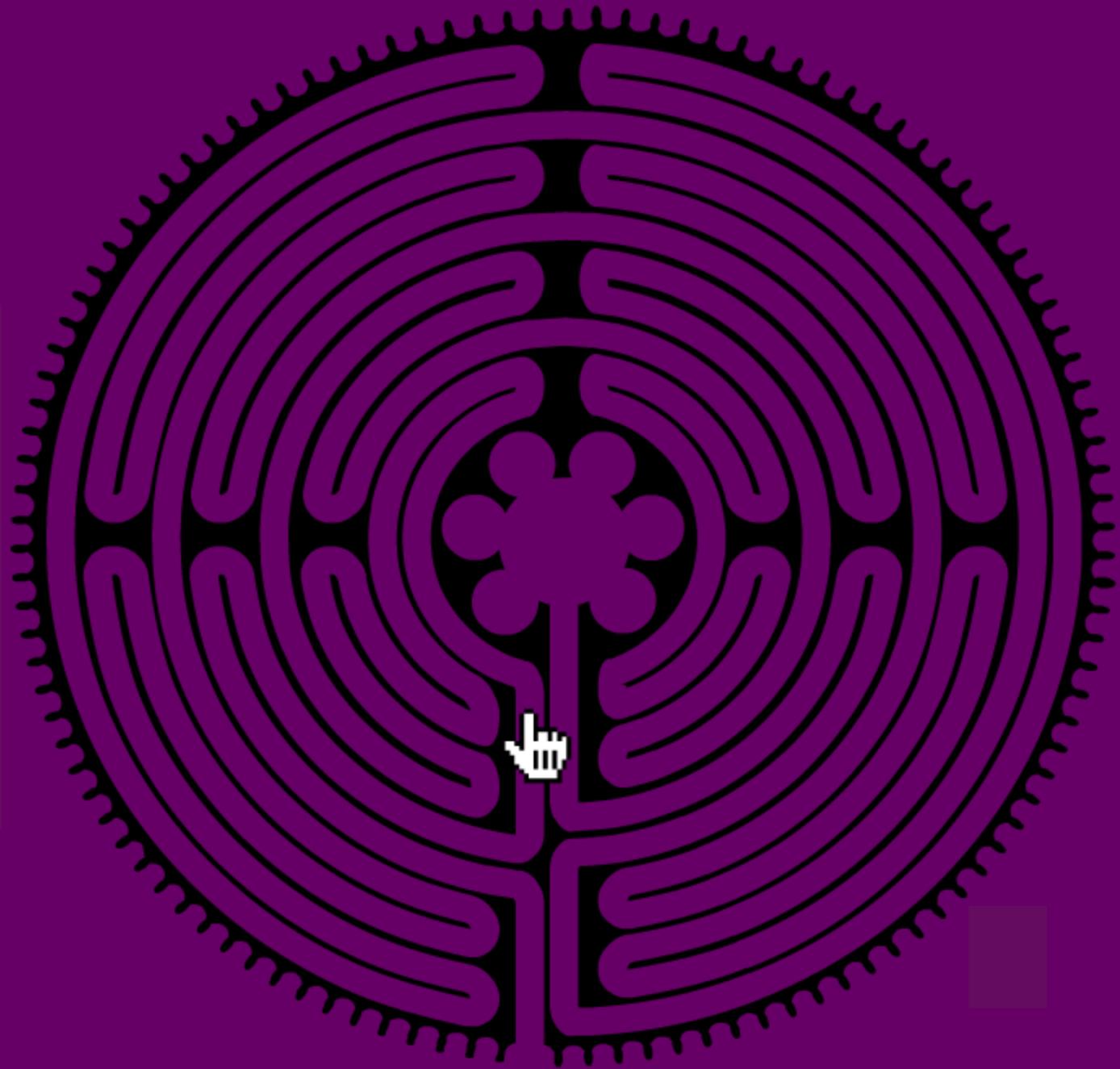
- 12 Concentric circles
  - 12 = 3 x 4
    - 3: Heaven: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
    - 4: Earth: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall
  - 34 Turns
    - 6 – 90°, 28 – 180°
  - Center rosette
    - Rose: sign of beauty, Divine/human Love
    - 6 Petals
      - Days of Creation
      - States: Mineral, Vegetable, Animal, Human, Angelic, Unknown

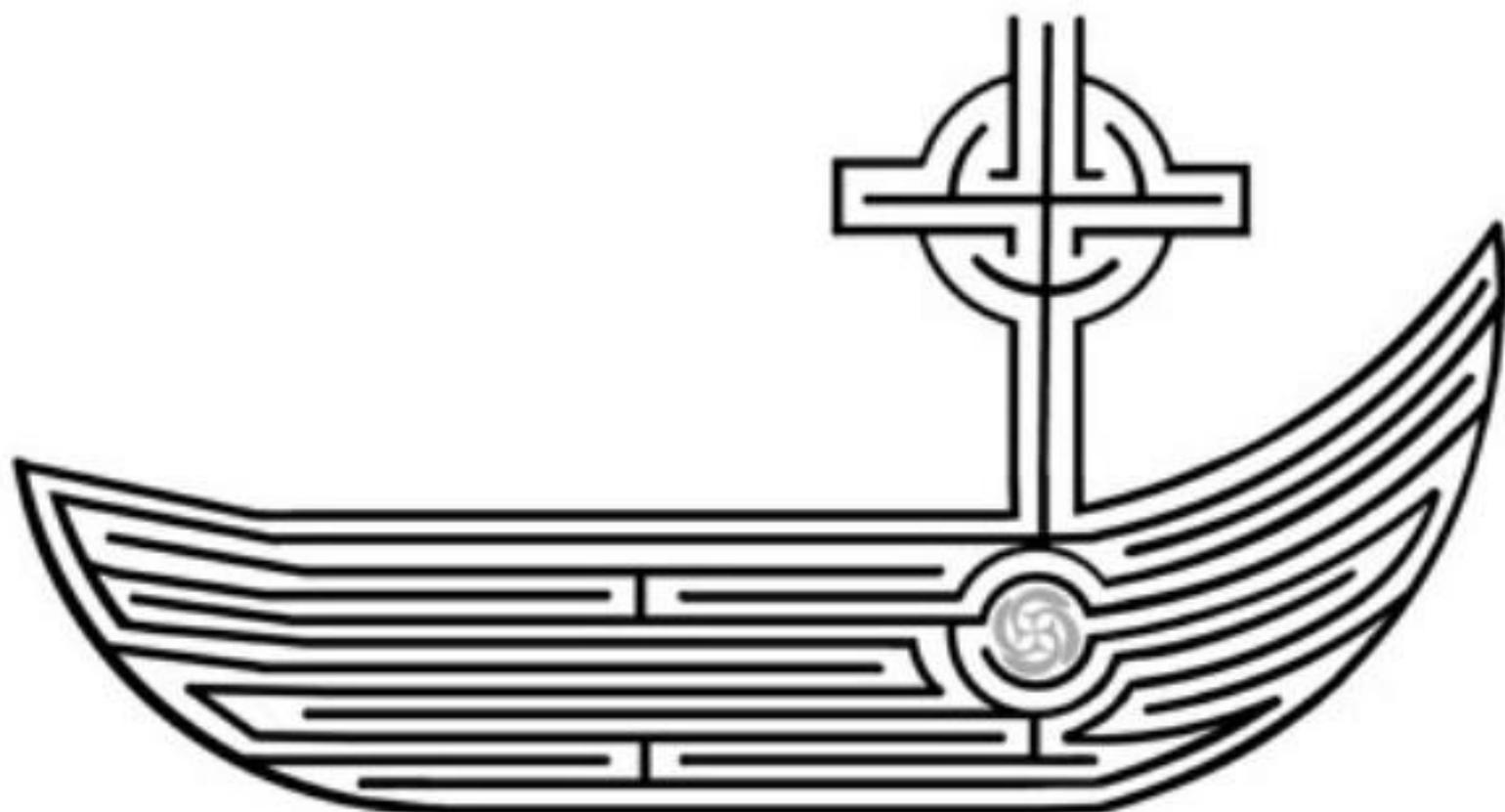
# SACRED GEOMETRY – 2

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- 10 Labyrns
  - Symbol of women's power and creativity
  - Lunations
    - 112 Foils
    - 113 Cusps
    - ~ 28 Lunations per quarter
  - 13 Pointed star







fear not for God will be unto us a helper a  
mariner and a pilot may God do unto us his  
servants and his little vessel as he willeth



# Our Path Ahead

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- Church of the Ascension has installed an eight circuit Chartres Labyrinth
- There is a five foot diameter perimeter in which dedicated, engraved paver bricks can be placed
- Our Community – Ascension – Seneca – Oconee County – Upstate SC – ANYONE is invited to walk the Labyrinth - ANYTIME

## Eight Circuit Chartres Labyrinth



# ASCENSION LABYRINTH



# Labyrinth Internet Sites

- Grace Cathedral  
<http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth>
- Interactive Labyrinth on the computer  
<http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth/interactions/labyrinth.shtml>
- Finger Labyrinths  
<http://www.labyrinthproducts.com/whatisit.html>
- The Labyrinth Company  
<http://www.labyrinthcompany.com>
- Veriditas  
<http://www.veriditas.org>  
If you search South Carolina on this site, it will show all the labyrinths in our state and their characteristics.
- Relax4Life  
<http://www.relax4life.com>
- Wikipedia  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labyrinth>
- Finding Stone  
<http://www.findingstone.com/workshops/labyrinth/>
- Labyrinths and mazes  
<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/paradigm/historypage1.html>