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Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Using the Labyrinth to Foster Community Prayer and Devotion

Denice Knight-Slater

Abstract: While excellent resources are available to teach people how to use labyrinths in personal ways, there are fewer guides available for seeking Christian community awareness using that same tool. This essay seeks to explore the value of a labyrinth as a sacred space, and it offers several novel suggestions for incorporating the labyrinth into the rhythms of the church. Although very little is known about how medieval Christians utilized the labyrinth, today's Christians can still experience God in those same spaces. People need physical spaces in which they can gather in unexpected ways—places where they can explore their spiritual creativity in community. Churches are encouraged to consider how a labyrinth might be specifically used to foster community prayer and devotion. For example, the space could be used for commemorating life passages, allowing community prayers to be offered, remembering the liturgical calendar, practicing lectio divina, celebrating intergenerational solidarity, and exploring community discernment. Finally, churches are invited to practice hospitality by sharing their labyrinth space with guests.

My great-grandmother was born in 1891, but more importantly, she baked pies. She taught my grandmother how to bake pies, and my granny made a little business out of it. Then, Granny taught my mom to bake pies. I had to fight off the neighbors to get my fair share of the strawberry-rhubarb pies that Mom made every summer. When I married my husband, he expected great pies, but he found himself sorely disappointed. My mother wanted her daughter focused on academics; in her opinion, learning to make pies could wait. I grew into a young woman who had very few cooking skills, and I considered the kitchen to be a somewhat irrelevant room.

A labyrinth is a bit like a kitchen. If people don't know what to do with it, then why have one? Whatever traditions were passed along within the labyrinth disappeared sometime after the medieval period. Although labyrinths appear as a backdrop in history—dating back to a couple thousand years before Christ—very little is known about their function in ancient societies. One of the most well-referenced labyrinths is inlaid on the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France and was completed in the thirteenth century; yet, Lauren Artress, a founder of the modern labyrinth movement, writes that she is unaware of any “Christian writers or artists who directly refer to the labyrinth as a spiritual tool.”¹ She suggests two reasons for the lack of evidence of labyrinth use: perhaps the labyrinth was so common that its function did not necessitate discussion, or possibly the labyrinth was so sacred that its use was kept shrouded in mystery and secrecy. Whatever the reason for our lack of knowledge, people lost the old significance of the labyrinth. It slowly became the kitchen that no one knew how to use.

Building New Traditions

A labyrinth is nothing more than a tool. It has no special, magical powers to transform individuals or the world. It can, however, become sacred space. God sanctifies space and time when Christians enter into a relationship with their Creator. In a world filled with modern distractions, the power to illuminate reality as a time of holiness rests securely in the hands of God. Where humans see ordinary, God sees possibility—places where the Spirit can unveil the divine that infuses the fullness of creation. Even the burning bush appeared to just be flaming foliage until God told Moses, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod 3:5, NRSV). God alone creates sacred space. Christians do not need to know how the labyrinth was used hundreds or thousands of years ago; in fact, God can do something wholly new and exciting with the space.

When John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, someone was courageous enough to ask Jesus why his own disciples did not fast. Jesus responded that his disciples could not fast while the

¹ Artress practices Christianity, but she recognizes that the labyrinth is a tool available for all who seek clarity in their lives. She is comfortable discussing several spiritual traditions in her book. Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 55.

bridegroom was present, but that they would when he was gone. He continued to explain, “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:21-22, NRSV); thus, fasting was not discouraged, but the practice was reoriented to face forward—toward Christ. The same instruction can help Christians with the use of a labyrinth. Scott Cormode writes that “we cannot be shackled to the ways the gospel has always been presented. ... We will need to think more like farmers ... [who] organize their efforts around the seasons of the year.”² Cormode suggests that communal story is a means by which churches can encourage transformation, and he concludes that the goal of the modern pastor is “to create shared stories of hope that make spiritual sense of the longings and losses of the people who God has entrusted to our care.”³ Cormode recalls biblical stories where Jesus reframed the narratives that the Jewish people held too rigidly, often revealing how legalism fostered injustice for the marginalized. Jesus did not change the gospel message, only the interpretations and applicable meanings; thus, Cormode suggests that we keep our “historic faith” but give it fresh packaging. Creating community story, however, is no lone endeavor. People need physical spaces in which they can gather in unexpected ways—places where they can explore their spiritual creativity in community.

While walking a labyrinth can certainly be a solitary, introspective practice, Christians would do well to consider how the use of a labyrinth might foster community prayer and devotion. As members of God’s family, Christians bear a responsibility for the welfare of their brothers and sisters in the faith. Shirley Guthrie writes that through Christ, Christians meet “a God of self-giving, suffering love, but also a God of powerful, liberating love. To be a Christian ... is to experience the renewing grace of God that empowers them to get up and move out of their sinfulness into active, joyful service of God and fellow human beings.”⁴ The service to which Guthrie refers would surely embrace practices that empty us of self-focused

² Scott Cormode, *The Innovative Church: How Leaders and Their Congregations Can Adapt in an Ever-Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 3.

³ Cormode, 21.

⁴ Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 272.

behaviors while promoting actions that are community-focused and Spirit-led. The labyrinth can be used in that way, and part of a pastor's role is to be a visionary—one who can suggest a myriad of ways to foster intimacy with the Lord.

Andrew Root suggests that a pastor “must do something much more difficult than our ancestors had to: she must contend that a personal God can act in an impersonal universe and therefore challenge the theory that the universe is closed.”⁵ Root's words pose a challenge. Ministry work has clearly changed since the earliest days of the Church, and the current milieu of secularization and individuality presents daunting and complex challenges for modern ministers. Root offers, “Divine action is encountered in our secular age through personal encounter. But the pastor's job is to create the environment for such personal encounters, not to have deep personal relationships with everyone.”⁶ The modern universe seems closed to the idea of an enchanting God, but Root reminds his readers that our God moves and loves through endless acts of ministry. Community-building projects can invite God into a space where such ministry flourishes and nurtures people. The authors of *The Godbearing Life* write, “The broader Christian community provides the means of support to stay on the road and the corrective against going down our own paths of self-obsession and sometimes self-destruction.”⁷ In the labyrinth, Christians are encouraged to walk a path that winds its way *through* the community, and all roads lead to the heart of God.

Creating a Path

The allure of a Christian labyrinth is not found in the materials of the trail; the beauty of the labyrinth is in the penetrating connections made between God and the community as God reveals the Spirit to those who seek spiritual wisdom. Seeking such beauty should be encouraged right from the start of the labyrinth building. As a community project, everyone should be welcomed into the process, even children. Robert Ferré, a labyrinth design consultant, notes that he has installed labyrinths for large youth conferences, and the “organizers of the conferences were surprised

⁵ Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 56.

⁶ Root, 236.

⁷ Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 126.

by how the youth took to the labyrinth.”⁸ Going a step further, then, we might consider involving the youth right from the conception of the idea. The congregation will most likely need a committee to design the space, consider costs, raise funds, and prepare the location. Inviting diversity into the planning phase will be the start of building community on a project that may take a great deal of time.

As a congregation, the size of the community should be kept at the forefront of the construction conceptions. Such spiritual wisdom will serve the community well as it seeks to create an adequately sized labyrinth. The space may need to be large enough to welcome more than one person at a time onto the path. The eleven-circuit design of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth (see figure 1) is nearly forty-three feet across, and the paths are about fifteen inches wide including the outlining. As a church community, the congregation will want to consider how large of a labyrinth is desired, where it will be installed, who will have access to it, and the times when it will be available. If the plan is for intermittent, limited use, then there are large cloth labyrinths available, but a permanent labyrinth—edged perhaps with stone or living hedges—is a greater undertaking and a more satisfying community-building experience. Like the creation of a prayer garden or church courtyard, building a labyrinth necessitates prayerful consideration and community discernment.



Figure 1 - Chartres Cathedral labyrinth design.

Space should be allowed for discernment processes to take root. Initially, the congregation may not be receptive to building a labyrinth. It is likely, though, that if ministry leaders openly embrace contemplative practices in their faith community, many members will begin to accept labyrinth walking as a beautiful opportunity to worship God together. Jackie Halstead, the founder of Selah Center for Spiritual Formation, has led groups through labyrinth walks, and she remarks, “It is a joy to lead others in this beloved prayer form. ... They and the rest of the group, albeit in silence, have a strong sense of the community in this shared journey. It draws them closer to each other as they draw closer to God.”⁹ Fostering

⁸ Robert D. Ferré, *Church Labyrinths* (Coppell, TX: Labyrinth Enterprises, 2013), 20.

⁹ Jackie L. Halstead, *Leaning into God’s Embrace: A Guidebook for Contemplative Prayer* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2021), 75.

such connections between faithful people and allowing them to explore God in unique ways should be a goal of every Christian community.

Far from being an isolating and mysterious curiosity, the church's labyrinth has the potential to become a valuable facet of community worship. The creation of a labyrinth can help establish an intergenerational haven where every voice has merit. Contemplative techniques can be appreciated by nearly every age group; in particular, they can foster communities that accept and value the input of the youth. Ron Bruner writes, "As parents and friends of adolescents, we must invite them into relationships—into a learning community—where we discover the practice of discernment together."¹⁰ All attempts at self-aggrandizement will prove futile in labyrinth building; awareness of that simple fact is both enlightening and inviting. Everyone enters the discernment process on equal footing, waiting for the Spirit to lead. Building a labyrinth will add valuable worship space to the church, space where community growth can sprout and thrive. Churches must ensure that the younger generation can be a vital part of that growth—both physically and spiritually.

Building a labyrinth together means there is no first person to walk the path. Every person who digs a hole, places a stone, or accepts any job in the construction has placed his or her sole on the winding way. By engaging in communal work, people will inevitably discover that they also walk alongside the Creator as they actively pursue the spiritual charge of caring for God's creation. As the labyrinth begins to take shape, God's presence in the labors can be a source of inspirational revelation. In that respect, the work of the community has already produced fruit, but the day will come when the people declare that the construction is finished. The celebration of that day can be one of the first uses of the congregation's new space. The community should take time to plan the occasion around the labyrinth—perhaps a picnic encircling it, a communal prayer-walk through it, or a festive dedication ceremony held in the center. The discernment process does not stop just because the construction tape is pulled down around the labyrinth. In fact, with the initial construction work finished, one of the first considerations the congregation will need to address is the caretakers of the space. This is another excellent opportunity to foster intergenerational community ties and to practice further discernment. The labyrinth will

¹⁰ Ron Bruner, "Discernment: Core Spiritual Practice of the Disciple" in *Owning Faith: Reimagining the Role of Church and Family in the Faith Journey of Teenagers*, eds. Dudley Chancey and Ron Bruner (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2017), 101.

need upkeep, and a small group assigned to the task will need to develop a care routine and schedule, and they should be encouraged to meet together in faithfulness for their caretaking tasks.

Walking in Faith

Helen Curry, The Labyrinth Society's first president and an inter-faith minister, teaches meditation using labyrinths. In *The Way of the Labyrinth*, she reflects on a question that she hears frequently—What should I think about as I walk the labyrinth? She writes, "To ask what you should think about is to miss the point of the labyrinth. It is a tool for you to know your own truth."¹¹ Specifically as Christians, though, the labyrinth could become a tool to explore *God's Truth* through communal prayer and devotion. Seeking to reflect Christ's selflessness, Christians must embrace Paul's encouragement: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:4, NRSV). Rather than focusing on individual enlightenment, then, our thoughts may need to be redirected toward the welfare of our community and our world. The labyrinth can serve as a container for spiritual practices that train people to reorient themselves toward this broader emphasis. While excellent resources are available to teach people how to use the labyrinth in a personal way, there are fewer guides available for seeking Christian community awareness. If a church seeks to foster intergenerational community love, then it might consider some of these specific ways that the labyrinth can be of value:

Commemorating Life Passages

Walking the labyrinth invites both reflection and contemplation. Thoughtful meditation on life passages—such as births, baptisms, weddings, and life memorials—should be encouraged at the labyrinth. As a communal space, the labyrinth can provide an intentional setting for celebrations and ceremonies. Curry writes, "Weddings on the labyrinth are wonderful and have a completely different feel than traditional weddings. Rather than the traditional walk down the 'straight and narrow' of the church aisle, the couple walk around the paths and turns of the labyrinth—a much more accurate metaphor for the journey they are embarking upon."¹² While weddings may invite just two people to walk the path as

¹¹ Helen Curry, *The Way of the Labyrinth: A Powerful Meditation for Everyday Life* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2000), 53.

¹² Curry, 146.

guests watch from the sides, many labyrinths can accommodate several people walking at the same time. Such communal walking may be an excellent fit for some ceremonies. Ferré writes, “The act of walking together in community actually strengthens the experience.”¹³ The close bonds of an intergenerational community can truly come into focus at these life passage events where members of all ages are invited to participate in the church family’s life cycles.

Walking with Community Prayers

Many individuals have walked the labyrinth while lifting up personal prayers. A natural extension of that spiritual practice would be to take the prayers of others into the labyrinth. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard writes, “How misguided are those who regard prayer as irrelevant to social conditions! ... nothing is more relevant to social conditions than the transformation of persons that comes from prayer at its best in the life of the disciple of Christ.”¹⁴ Communal life demands attention to prayer for one another, the congregation, and the world. Congregation members might be given an opportunity to write their prayers for the community on small cards that are collected and delivered to the members who wish to walk the labyrinth. Perhaps this collection is taken quarterly or annually. The cards can be distributed along the path where walkers can pick up a new card as they feel led. Walking toward the center, the prayers can be given to God; walking out from the center, the labyrinth walkers might consider praying for resolution for communal concerns according to God’s will.

Remembering the Liturgical Calendar

Ideally, the labyrinth will be incorporated into the church’s rhythms, and the Christian calendar can be an excellent source for establishing a set pattern of communal gatherings. Reflecting on spiritual formation and the liturgical calendar, Wes Horn writes, “The genius of the liturgical Christian year is its repetition. Although participation in the Christian calendar produces [a] measure of spiritual growth, the real test comes as a

¹³ Ferré, 15.

¹⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 185.

congregation participates in the calendar again and again.”¹⁵ The liturgical calendar and the labyrinth are both meant to be persistently experienced. To commemorate events in Christ’s life, a congregation may already plan events around Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, and/or Easter; perhaps that church even commemorates older biblical events such as the Passover. Inviting the community into the labyrinth during the liturgical cycle can help with awareness and observation of these special times. The labyrinth is an excellent place to gather and teach the biblical stories that underpin the Christian liturgical calendar. Special or seasonal decorations for the labyrinth can be considered (something which even the youngest members of the church will enjoy). For example, the caretakers might add evergreen garlands and candles for Advent and Christmas or place a cross at the center for Easter. Renewing the look and feel of the space invites others to experience the life of the seasons.

Practicing *Lectio Divina*¹⁶

Often a solitary practice, *lectio divina* can easily become a community practice within the labyrinth. Ruth Haley Barton writes, “The practice of *lectio divina* is rooted in the belief that through the presence of the Holy Spirit the Scriptures are alive, active, and God-breathed. This was true when they were first inspired and written, and it is true today when we engage them for spiritual transformation.”¹⁷ Leaders should consider choosing passages that focus on lifting the community as one body into the presence of God. Adapting Barton’s instructions from *Sacred Rhythms*, the labyrinth walkers who seek to practice *lectio divina* should be still and quiet for a few moments and then begin walking when they feel at peace. At that time, a designated person should begin to read the assigned scripture aloud to the group. Generally, *lectio divina* incorporates reading the scriptural passage four times, during which a particular pattern of listening is

¹⁵ Wes Horn, “Churches of Christ, Spiritual Formation, and the Liturgical Christian Calendar,” *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*, 1 1 (2015), 50.

¹⁶ Eugene Peterson writes, “*Lectio divina* is a way of reading the Scriptures that is congruent with the way the Scriptures serve the Christian community as a witness to God’s revelation of himself to us.” Such reading invites God’s penetration into our souls. *Lectio divina* becomes an etiquette for thoughtfully and obediently approaching the Word. Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 81-82.

¹⁷ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Spiritual Practices that Nourish Your Soul and Transform Your Life, Participant’s Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 39.

engaged.¹⁸ Each time the reader speaks the words of the scripture, it should be done slowly and deliberately at key intervals—perhaps waiting until everyone has passed through the center before reading the fourth and final time. The size of the group and the pace of the walkers can inform the start of each reading.

Celebrating Solidarity

Small, intergenerational groups with a common interest should be encouraged to walk the labyrinth together. For example, a diverse group of women might meet to discuss a different devotional book each month and then walk the labyrinth after a group discussion. Something often missing in contemporary church culture—especially among the youth—is a sense of belonging in the community. Christians must strive to move beyond the individual self and encourage others to do the same. They will need to be intentional with their community building efforts. With that in mind, they should consider ways that groups can help promote solidarity between members. In the women’s group mentioned above, perhaps a new member might be given a long scarf or shawl that can be draped over the head as she walks the labyrinth—creating a type of prayer closet.¹⁹ Such a gift welcomes newcomers into a smaller, loving group, and it also grants an air of Christian mysticism to the labyrinth walk. American historian Frederick Turner writes that in “branding all vestiges of ancient mythic practices vain, impious superstition, the Church had effectively removed divinity from its world. But its victory here was pyrrhic, for it had rendered its people alienated sojourners in a spiritually barren world where the only outlet for the urge to life was the restless drive onward.”²⁰ Youth seem to instinctively recognize the supernatural, but for too long the Western Church (and perhaps more evidenced in some Protestant denominations) has been suspicious of the unseen world. The labyrinth can convert suspicion to

¹⁸ *Lectio divina* incorporates *lectio* (read and savor the text), *meditatio* (meditate on the meaning of the text), *oratio* (pray and invite God to reveal the text), and *contemplatio* (experience the text in life). All of these can be pursued in a community setting.

¹⁹ For centuries, Western Christianity has defined the prayer closet as an actual room, perhaps a small closet or pantry. See Edward Wetenhall, *Enter into thy Closet: Or, a Method and Order for Private Devotion* (London: John Martyn, 1676). Judaism, however, defines the prayer closet as the private space created when one drapes the prayer shawl, the *tallit*, over one’s head.

²⁰ Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness* (New York: Viking, 1980), 82.

wonder, allowing the church to embrace a decidedly *Christian* mysticism as people walk along the path.

Walking (and Journaling) for Community Discernment

Christian journaling is another solitary practice that can be adapted as a community exercise in the labyrinth. Rather than writing personal thoughts and feelings in a private journal, the labyrinth journal encourages a community focus. The responses should be guided by a single concentration—perhaps an issue requiring communal discernment. In such a case, the nature of the issue, applicable scriptures, and a short list of questions might be transcribed into the community’s labyrinth journal. Labyrinth walkers can pray over the issue, scripture, and questions as they walk the circuits. Walkers can be encouraged to refresh themselves with the issue when they reach the center of the labyrinth (perhaps a written copy can be placed in the center). When they exit the labyrinth, the journal gives them an opportunity to share their thoughts and impressions with the community. This process actively encourages community discernment by allowing everyone a voice, even those who might normally remain quiet in more energetic social situations. Diana Shiflett writes, “A simple discernment process takes the power players out of the power seat and gives the power back to God, where it belongs.”²¹ Her advice is intriguing when we consider the anonymity of personal voices in the community journal for labyrinth walkers. With anonymous entries, all people—regardless of age or economic position—are invited to walk, reflect, and record their words in equality with the other writers. Slowly walking around the path of the labyrinth invites deep contemplation about the communal issue, and it provides the time to quietly process the Spirit’s guidance. A place to record those thoughts creates a repository of faithful and diverse voices that hopefully reflect Spirit-led recommendations for community issues.

²¹ Here Shiflett specifically addresses situations in which churches make decisions based primarily upon the recommendations of more affluent members. She advocates for discernment practices that level the field and encourage more voices regardless of the members’ financial statuses. Diana Shiflett, *Spiritual Practices in Community: Drawing Groups into the Heart of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 149.

Leading the Community into Invitation

Leadership should reflect the virtue of discernment and cultivate groups that will accept and protect all members. Susan Beaumont suggests that leadership begins with presence and is “characterized by an openness to wonder ... a willingness to experiment, take risks, and learn from mistakes. It is guided by Spirit, and it is willing to face failure.”²² This is especially true during the times when our local churches begin seeking new ways to invite the larger community into church spaces. Welcoming outsiders to explore our spiritual homes can create anxiety; it may even disorient established groups and disrupt social orders. Beaumont suggests that the best tool for maintaining forward navigation is thoughtful, community discernment, which need not emulate the work of others. She writes, “Although an interest in discernment is on the rise, the ancient tools of the practice remain largely unknown. ... We need to discover our own praxis.”²³ She suggests many ways to delineate between *deciding* approaches and *discerning* approaches, with discernment being the more desirable.²⁴ Godly communities should become well-springs of observation, discussion, advice, and discernment. By participating—actively and physically—in a faith community, people begin to witness the means by which they can live fully into their faith while still residing in the world. A discerning leadership style is not always simple; such a leader must be imaginative and innovative.

Creating spaces where people share in spiritual unity must be close to the heart of all Christian ministries. The praxis of spirituality should be a type that invites everyone into an exploration of God’s wisdom and love; our sacred practices should help us transcend the secular world as we seek to forge a relationship with the Holy One. Guiding people forward into that relationship requires phronetic leaders, and Carson Reed suggests that the goal (or *telos*) of leadership can be reframed through practical wisdom. He writes, “Indeed, I claim that for Christian theological constructs, the *telos* could well be something beyond the scope of a leader to deliver.”²⁵ In other words, people can accept the invitation to participate in God’s work, but

²² Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 24.

²³ Beaumont, 71.

²⁴ Beaumont, 73.

²⁵ Carson E. Reed, “The Ends of Leadership: Phronesis and the Leader as Guide,” in *The End of Leadership?: Leadership and Authority at Crossroads*, eds. Jack Barentsen, Steven C. VanDenheuveel, and Peirong Lin (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 142.

they must also appreciate that the fullness—the wholeness, the oneness—of God’s *missio Dei* is ultimately enigmatic in its totality and cannot be held by any individual human. Reflecting upon the writings of the Apostle Paul, Reed further notes, “The communal character of Paul’s writing reminds us that a community is the proving ground for transformation and discipleship.”²⁶ God’s mysterious purposes are intentionally designed to be explored from a communal perspective, and the best leaders maintain forward motion toward God’s presence which exists in the past, present, and future simultaneously. Reed summarizes, “Leadership that is oriented toward the reality of God actually begins with the end—God’s preferred future—and moves toward the present.”²⁷ In some respects, then, the concept of phronetic leadership may seem to wax esoteric, but a truly phronetic leader is foundationally one who seeks to distill God’s love of ministry into practical and tangible movement of the community toward God’s presence.

A well-used and oft-walked labyrinth can be used as a tool for developing a church’s community, but God encourages us to reach beyond our own walls. Jesus told his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19, NRSV); as Christians, we should all feel emboldened to reach out to those who have not yet experienced that the Lord is good. Perhaps a labyrinth may be the perfect space to host guests, and although a congregation may be tempted to protect it from the outside world, the labyrinth is an extension of the church. Visitors should be welcome in churches, and consequently, guests should also be welcomed into the church’s labyrinth. Extending a warm invitation to guests allows the space to become an extension of Christian hospitality. Churches will need to communicate behavioral expectations regarding issues such as quiet times, children, group sizes, etc., but allowing others to understand the space better will ensure that the labyrinth serves the Church well. At first, a church may be more comfortable if allowed to test the waters; it can take reservations or make the labyrinth available on certain days. For example, Lauren Artress notes that Grace Cathedral invites the public twice a month to their labyrinth.²⁸ Though a church may start with small steps, the space should be allowed to grow into its full potential. When Artress

²⁶ Reed, 151.

²⁷ Reed, 154.

²⁸ Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path*, 110.

visited a community labyrinth in Germany—one which was not specifically Christian—she discovered that the attention to communal space was reflective of God’s love for all people. She writes:

The pathways are lined with flowers and vegetables, and children have painted rocks to line the path. After work on summer evenings, people come by to tend the garden, walk the labyrinth, and greet one another in the course of their activity. This project is a wonderful way to bring a community together. Projects such as these are needed to cross-pollinate ideas and break down barriers between people.²⁹

Imagine such labyrinths in the heart of our own Christian communities. By stepping out of our comfort zone and interacting with people who may be different from ourselves, we practice the virtue of hospitality.

In practicing hospitality at the labyrinth, a church not only invites guests into its home, but it invites them right into the kitchen. About ten years after I married, I began to realize that the kitchen was not only useful, but it was an enjoyable space. I learned to cook, and to my husband’s delight, we soon found ourselves exploring recipes for Indian curries, Irish scones, Israeli shakshuka, and New York cheesecake; and yes, my mother even taught me to make my great-grandma’s strawberry-rhubarb pie. It became an immeasurable joy to feed my family, and I began to invite friends over for meals. In learning to use my kitchen, not only did my confidence grow, but my love of others began to grow as well. A labyrinth can be a church’s kitchen, and Christians can learn to use it. Believers must be strong and courageous in their desire to pursue the heart of God in novel ways. The Spirit dwells in community, so we must invite people and build new traditions that honor God and celebrate community. Make the kitchen a space to be used; make the church’s labyrinth a place of communion.

²⁹ Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path*, 126.

Denice Knight-Slater has been an educator for over a decade, and she currently teaches dual-credit courses through Colorado Christian University. She graduated from the University of Alaska with a B.S. in Biology (1996) and a B.A. in Anthropology (1999). Following employment with the USDA and the University of Arizona, she placed her science career on hold when she and her husband, Todd, were blessed with a child. She later completed an M.A. in Literary Criticism at Prescott College and an M.A. in Theological Studies at Austin Graduate School of Theology (now Lipscomb University–Austin Center). She enrolled at Abilene Christian University in 2020, and she is currently pursuing her D.Min, wherein her doctoral project will address ways to blend ministry and discipleship with academic courses in literature. She is happily settled in her home in Spring Branch, Texas with her husband and their son, Colton. Denice’s primary research interests include youth ministry, feminist literary criticism, and Christian mysticism.