

Serenity in the City

Find inner peace and harmony amidst the bustle of the Bayou City by walking one of the city's labyrinths.

BY STACY BARRY



Heidi Teichgraeber leads walks at the Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center labyrinth.

For most of us, our knowledge of the labyrinth stems from a ninth-grade study of mythology. We know it as the Minotaur's maze, a confusing structure from which only one hero emerged unscathed with the help of a golden thread from his true love.

But did you know that labyrinths exist outside of mythology and that we have them all over Houston? No, not tangled puzzles with deadly beasts inside. Quite the opposite—circular paths of meaning and meditation that allow users to unplug, destress and center themselves around what's important.

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Labyrinth walking at its most basic is a moving meditation through a circular structure leading to the center, both literally and figuratively. While a maze is designed to confuse and challenge the user, a labyrinth, with only one way in and one way out, provides a design that, if followed, makes it impossible to get lost. It's true, you can't always see which way you're to go next, but there are no dead ends or walls requiring you to turn around and start over.

"You have to pay attention and look where you're going, but you don't have to necessarily focus," says the Rev. Gail Williford with St. Paul's United Methodist Church in the museum district. "This allows

free range for the rest of the brain to enter a totally different consciousness that's really hard to explain."

Williford says that's even true for the St. Paul's labyrinth, which was a gift from the church to the city and is located on one of the busiest corners in Houston.

"Because some people find praying difficult to do sitting still, a walking meditation is often a more comfortable form of praying or getting in touch with what is beyond you," she says.

Heidi Teichgraeber with Holy Name Passionist Retreat Center agrees.

"Moving and meditating at the same time," she says, allows you "to still your mind and 'hear' the word of the divine within you."