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Labyrinth offers outlet for those seeking answers to life's journey

by Catherine Condon

Once or twice a week, Sister Joan McGinty can be found walking the labyrinth that has been mown into the lawn just south of the Sisters of St. Joseph's Carondelet Center at 1890 Randolph Ave. Patterned after the 12th-century stone labyrinth in France's Chartres Cathedral, the outdoor version has an 80-foot diameter and is composed of 15 concentric circles. Walking the three-quarter mile path can take up to 45 minutes.

"It's a prayer form," said McGinty, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph and volunteer

coordinator for the Carondelet Center.

Created by Wisdom Ways, an ecumenical spirituality program co-sponsored by the College of St. Catherine and the Sisters of St. Joseph, the labyrinth appeals to a wide variety of people, from the devoutly religious to those for whom it is their only spiritual practice, McGinty said.

"It's a symbol of life's journey," she said. "If I'm thinking about what I should do about

something as I walk the labyrinth, I believe that I'll come to know the answer or that I need to wait for the answer. It's an opportunity to be present to whatever is meant to be. It's one way that people can come to center themselves—to be able to listen."

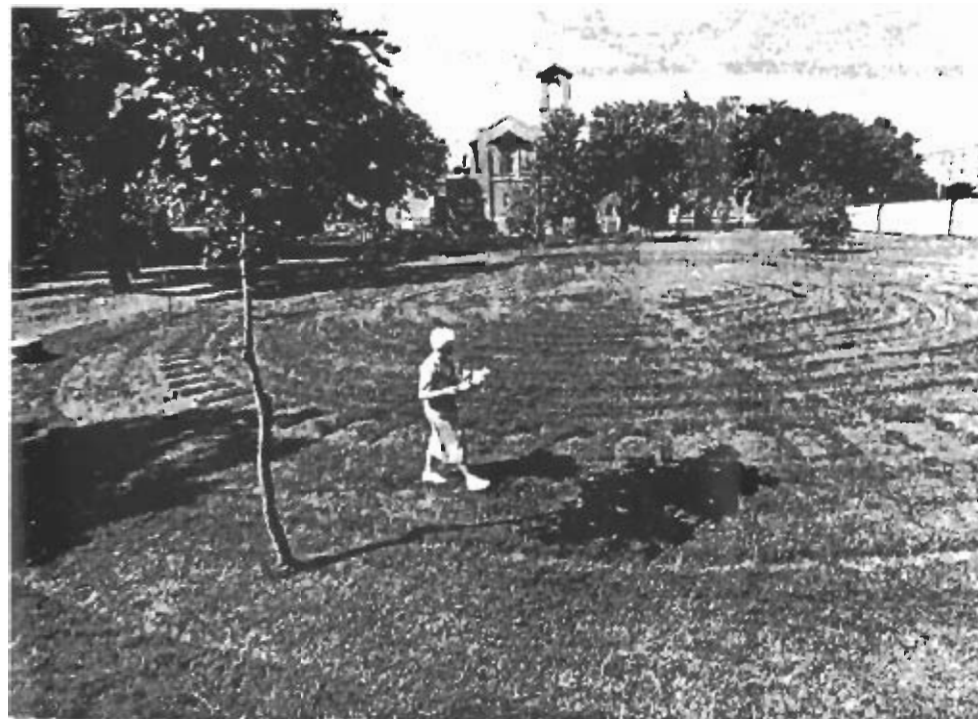
The labyrinth was created last summer for Wisdom Ways' 1997 Summer Spirituality Institute. "Our focus was on the spirituality of simplicity," said Wisdom Ways director Mary Kaye Medinger. "(The

labyrinth) was a way of linking the previous summer's theme of ecology in spirituality. We try and make these very holistic kinds of experiences—not just a series of lectures that people come and listen to where they engage only from the neck up."

After the institute, the CSJ community decided to keep the labyrinth open to the public. "They don't have to sign up or come into the building," Medinger said. Those who drive to the site may park in the O'Shaughnessy lot, which can be entered off Fairview Avenue just

Walking the labyrinth, which has a total of 64 turns leading to and from the center, can take up to 45 minutes.

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A sister of St. Joseph strolls along the labyrinth that has been moved into the lawn at the

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south of Randolph.

Used for the past 4,000 to 5,000 years throughout the world, labyrinths are present in almost every religious tradition and come in a myriad of forms. Unlike a maze, there are no dead ends nor decisions to be made. Labyrinths have only one path that leads to the center and back out. They have been carved in stone, mowed into wheat fields, traced into sand and woven into rugs.

A Web site (www.gracecathedral.org) lists more than 100 labyrinths in the United States. Locally, the United Theological Seminary in New Brighton has an outdoor labyrinth, Hennepin United Methodist Church in Minneapolis has a canvas labyrinth that it transports to various events, St. Thomas Becket Catholic Church in Eagan pieced together a colorful 36-foot labyrinth with clothing, and the parishioners of Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church in Mound drew a labyrinth on ice fishing tent material.

Wisdom Ways hosted a labyrinth retreat in May. "We thought we'd have about 20 people, but we had to cut it off at 50," Medinger said.

A labyrinth series also will be offered by Wisdom Ways on the second Wednesday of each month from September to May.

Every 10 days from April to October, Stu Bartholomaeus drives 20 miles from his home in Blaine to help maintain the Wisdom Ways labyrinth. A computer systems analyst, he spends an hour mowing and trimming the walking path, which has 64 turns leading to and from a flower-shaped center.

One of six trained labyrinth facilitators in the Twin Cities, Bartholomaeus said the labyrinth helps him handle the pressure of caring for elderly family members.

"People would probably say I'm obsessed," said Bartholomaeus, who also created an outdoor labyrinth at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist's retreat center in Annandale, and cares for the one in New Brighton. "But it's an outlet. The idea is that, going in, you shed whatever is going on in your life. You walk to the center and usually an idea comes forth. Then you walk out and figure out how you'll work into your life whatever you found out in the middle."

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