

the meditation walk

A stroll for the spirit. by Lorie Parch

When people talk about taking a spiritual path, they don't usually mean it literally. But more than 250,000 people have journeyed to San Francisco's Grace Cathedral to walk on a 40-foot-wide labyrinth in search of peace.

How can a meandering circular walk help to resolve profound questions? "Walking is meditative," says the Rev. Lauren Artress, Ph.D., founder of the cathedral's Labyrinth Project and author of *Walking a Sacred Path* (Riverhead Books). "In surrendering to the winding path, the soul finds healing and wholeness."

Every day 100 or so people gather to walk the walk, much as medieval travelers did in Europe's great cathedrals to mark the end of their spiritual pilgrimages. To observers, the ritual looks like a board game come to life. To participants, it is a celebration and a kind of spiritual tool.

There are three stages to the walk: The first, on the way to the center of the labyrinth, symbolizes letting go of, or "shedding," the details of your life; the second stage, called "illumination," takes place at the center. At this stage, reserved for prayer and meditation, many participants report experiencing illumination about some aspect of their lives. As they return along the path on which they began, they enter a tranquil third stage, "union," which signifies a joining with God.

If you have the chance to walk the labyrinth, start by emptying your mind of worries. Concentrate on a question or simply quiet your mind and think about where you are in life. Become aware of your breath and feel free to find your own pace. For more information about labyrinth walks around the country, write to Veriditas at Grace Cathedral, 1100 California St., San Francisco, CA 94108. ♦

Walk this way: the labyrinth at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco.

