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SATURDAY
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HOUSTON CHRONICLE
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RELIGION

COMING NEXT WEEK

■ Houston-area kids attend Hindu Heritage Camp to learn more about their culture and religion — and have fun.

FAITH | BELIEFS | ETHICS | THEOLOGY | MINISTRY | CLERGY | MUSIC | EDUCATION | VALUES | HOLY DAYS

Saturday, July 22, 2006

FIND A LABYRINTH

Houston is home to a number of labyrinths, including:

■ St. Thomas University; next to St. Basil's Chapel on West Alabama; 7 a.m.-dusk.

■ Sylvan Rodriguez Park, 1201 Clear Lake Blvd.

Designed by Houston artist Dixie Friend Gay and based on the Chartres labyrinth. Open 6 a.m.-8 p.m.

■ Covenant Church, 4949 Caroline. Outdoor Chartres-type labyrinth. Open 24/7. Full Moon walk, 9 p.m. Aug. 9.

■ Dominican Sisters, 6501 Alameda. Indoor labyrinth available by reservation. Individuals are welcome to the outdoor Chartres-style labyrinth during daylight hours. Groups or night visitors should call first; 713-747-3310.

■ St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 1656 Blalock. Blue and white, Chartres-style canvas labyrinth; 7-9 p.m. first Tuesday of each month beginning Sept. 1, or by appointment; 713-465-6015.

■ St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 3471 Westheimer. Outdoor garden labyrinth at Edloe and Kipling near the church's Next Door Coffeehouse; daylight hours.

■ Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, 9600 S. Gessner. Eleven-circuit outdoor labyrinth. Dawn to dusk.

■ Cenacle Retreat House, 420 N. Kirkwood. Outdoor seven-circuit Cretan-style labyrinth; 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays.

■ Northwoods Presbyterian Church, 3320 FM 1960 West. Outdoor labyrinth; open dawn to dusk.

■ For more information, or to rent a labyrinth, visit HoustonLabyrinthNetwork.org.

WALK OF FAITH

■ Labyrinths offer retreat for prayer and meditation

By **BARBARA KARKABI**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

On a quiet morning this week, Elaine Pyle was a solitary figure walking the labyrinth at the University of St. Thomas.

Shoes off, she slowly worked her way around the pink-hued paths that ultimately lead to the center, where a rose pattern symbolizes the Virgin Mary. Sitting in a lotus-type position, she spent 10 minutes in prayer and meditation before beginning her outward journey.

Pyle, who is studying for her master's degree in theology, walks the labyrinth at the university four times a week before morning classes. She walks a fifth time on

a labyrinth at Northwoods Presbyterian Church.

"It's a spiritual experience," Pyle said of the 20 to 30 minutes she spends on the labyrinth each day. "When I'm walking, I try to purge my mind of negative thoughts, and in the middle, I sit for a while and listen to the voice of God. On the way out, I try to assimilate what I have learned and apply it to my day. It definitely gives me a feeling of peace."

The St. Thomas labyrinth is the latest addition to Houston's many labyrinths — a growing trend both locally and nationally. Located next to the Chapel of St. Basil, it was completed in May.

Others can be found at churches, hospitals, retreat centers, parks, gardens and even private backyards. Some groups have portable canvas ones. Most of the permanent labyrinths, like the one at St. Thomas, follow the 11-circuit design of the



INWARD JOURNEY: The new labyrinth is adjacent to the university's Chapel of St. Basil.

famous 13th-century labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France.

The Rev. Lauren Artress, an Episcopal priest at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, Please see **LABYRINTH**, Page F9

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Tips from the Dominican Sisters of Houston for a personal pilgrimage:

■ Use the walk to pray for events or situations, a particular person or people, or for the planet itself.

■ There is only one path to the center, and the same path returns outward. You may pass people on the way.

■ Clear your mind and become aware of your breathing.

■ Some people stop at each turn and say a short mantra or prayer.

■ The center is a place of prayer and meditation.



LABYRINTH: Called a 'medieval tool in a post-modern age'

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is credited with starting the American labyrinth movement in the early 1990s.

She has described the labyrinth as a "medieval tool in a post-modern age." But it has an ancient history, dating back at least 4,000 years. The ancient Greek myth of Theseus and the fierce Minotaur refers to a labyrinth on Crete.

Variations of the labyrinth appear in many cultures, including the medicine wheels of the Hopi, the mandalas of Tibetan Buddhism and the mystical Judaism of the cabala. Ancient turf labyrinths can still be found in England and Scandinavia.

In the Middle Ages, labyrinths were adapted by Christianity, said the Rev. Ted Baenziger, who watched from his second-floor office as workers built the St. Thomas labyrinth of Texas sandstone and slate.

When several people at St. Thomas suggested it was a "New Agey" idea, he soon set them straight.

"There was a huge movement for pilgrimage to the Holy Land" in the Middle Ages, Baenziger said.

But such a trip was difficult for most people, who instead would make pilgrimages to cathedrals such as Chartres that had labyrinths inlaid in their floors.

By walking a labyrinth, "you get the impression of going on a long voyage with lots of twists and turns, getting closer then

farther away and finally reaching your destination," he said. "It's a spiritual exercise."

To Baenziger, a French professor who has walked with students on pilgrimages from Paris to Chartres, the labyrinth symbolizes the universe and the individual's attempt to get to the center of things.

But don't confuse a labyrinth with a maze, he said. A maze has tricks and turns and is designed to confuse. Labyrinths have one way in and one way out.

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Jennifer Embry, a Houston psychotherapist, walked her first labyrinth when Artress visited Christ Church Cathedral in 1996.

"It opened up a place in me that I didn't know before," Embry said. "There is something in this ancient archetypal symbol, and it's incredibly inclusive; anyone can do it. There is a movement from right to left, you go far out and come back in. It's soothing and a stress reducer."

Last summer, she accompanied Artress to Chartres, where she trained to be a Veriditas labyrinth facilitator. Walking the Chartres labyrinth at night with candles was an experience Embry will never forget.

"As I walked in, Lauren Artress handed me a candle and said, 'Let your light shine,'" Embry recalls. "It's just imprinted in me."

Since then, she has led laby-



A WALKING PRAYER: Beverly Garcia, who built a labyrinth overlooking Canyon Lake after moving there from Houston, walks a portable canvas labyrinth she brought to First Methodist Houston - Westchase during the National Day of Prayer in May.

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rinth walks at the Women's Home in Houston, a place for women in crisis; for an eating-disorder group; and for several patients. Her dream is to have a private labyrinth where she can work individually with patients. She sees the labyrinth as a link between psychology and spirituality.

Embry enjoys using the labyrinth at Covenant Church, an American Baptist congregation in the Museum District. Built by church members six years ago, it's made of crushed granite and paver stones in the Chartres style. Scheduled walks, often with music, are held seven times a year.

"I like that it's outside and in the city," she said. "It's a sacred space, and I love walking there when the choir practices."

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Building a labyrinth can be costly. The Marie Babin Gueymard Memorial Garden and labyrinth at St. Thomas cost an estimated \$372,000. Funds were donated by Adolphe G. Gueymard in memory of his mother and by alumnae Ruth Westkaemper. The cost also covered a rose garden and landscaping, three fountains representing the Trinity and four benches — three to represent the Trinity and one for man.

Houston's Dominican Sisters already had an indoor canvas labyrinth at their Alameda Road convent when they decided to construct an outdoor version.

"We started to get a lot of

people coming, and we thought: 'Why not?'" recalled Sister Heloise Cruzat. "We are at the Mother House and would like our grounds to be a place of prayer that is attractive to people."

That has turned out to be true. People often stop by to walk on their lunch hour or after work at the nearby Texas Medical Center, and groups of schoolchildren visit on field trips. The \$70,000 terra-cotta and cream-colored labyrinth was dedicated in 2002.

Cruzat once wondered if labyrinths were just a passing phase.

"It very well may be, but if it is, it's not passing fast," she said. "This is a very fractured moment in our history, and I think people are looking for a sense of meaning and purpose."

Walking the labyrinth, she believes, puts people in harmony with themselves and their surroundings. On her walks, she uses guided prayer and Scripture, followed by silence.

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Beverly Garcia, a native Houstonian who moved to Canyon Lake near New Braunfels, was in town for the National Day of Prayer with her portable labyrinth. Like Embry, she is a certified facilitator trained in Artress' Veriditas program.

"As a facilitator, I tell people about the history of the labyrinth and how it's used," Garcia said. "We talk about how to have the best experience, how to use

it as a tool to either go into their spiritual life or to problem solve, how to let go or just de-stress. I like silence. We pray to God, but how often are we silent enough to hear the answers?"

In 2004, Garcia and her two stepdaughters built a labyrinth overlooking Canyon Lake. The Lone Eagle Labyrinth is built in a chalice style, a six-circuit design, with local gray granite stones, crushed granite paths and smooth, tumbled glass.

She enjoys using music or placing candles around the labyrinth. Embry has drummed on labyrinths, others have danced and even crawled.

"It's only limited by our imagination," Embry said. "I would say the labyrinth is my church. I truly like that there are no walls."

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CLARITY OF MIND AND SOUL: The Rev. Ted Baenziger, a professor at UST, emphasizes that labyrinths, which provide clear paths to their centers, are not mazes, which are designed to cause confusion.

LEARN ABOUT LABYRINTHS

The Rev. Lauren Artress is considered the founder of the American labyrinth movement. For more information, check out her books and Web sites.

- *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice* (Riverhead Trade; \$14)
- *The Sacred Path Companion* (Riverhead Trade; \$14)
- www.gracecathedral.org
- www.veriditas.net

A SACRED JOURNEY



CONTEMPLATION: Before her morning classes four days a week, graduate student Elaine Pyle walks the labyrinth at the University of St. Thomas, then sits quietly to "listen to the voice of God."

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