Former skeptic hosts New Year’s Day labyrinth walk

By Scott Hewitt (author/shewitt), Columbian
Arts & Features Reporter
Published: December 29, 2018, 6:00 AM

Cindy Haverkrate walks Eunice Schroeder’s portable labyrinth on New Year’s Day 2015 at First Presbyterian Church in Vancouver. (The Columbian files)

The first time Eunice Schroeder walked a labyrinth, she was skeptical and nervous.

“My life is already messed up and I feel lost,” she thought. “Why would I want to compound that by walking a maze?”

But the second time, when she found peace at the center, Schroeder burst into sobs. “I cried buckets of tears. I didn’t know why,” she said — but the surprising power of the experience pointed her toward a whole new direction in life.

Schroeder decided to study religion in graduate school, and when it was time to choose a topic for her doctoral dissertation, she went with the long history and recent resurgence of labyrinths.

“The symbol itself goes back thousands and thousands of years. No one knows for sure just how far back,” she said. “They found labyrinths carved on cave walls. It’s a very ancient symbol but it wasn’t until the Middle Ages that you see walking labyrinths. Right around 1200 A.D. there was a big surge of church labyrinth building,” including the huge one at Chartres Cathedral, which remains the largest in France and the inspiration for a current trend of spiritual labyrinth walking that Schroeder has helped push along.

Schroeder purchased a giant, portable labyrinth and spent years hosting walking events all over the Pacific Northwest, she said, but that’s slowed recently. She still hosts an annual, open New Year’s Day labyrinth walk at First Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, where the next one is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Jan. 1. During that window, visitors are welcome to come and go and take the walk as they please.

If You Go

- **What:** New Year’s Day open labyrinth walk.
- **When:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Jan. 1 (come and go anytime).
- **Where:** Lower level at First Presbyterian Church, 4300 Main St., Vancouver.
- **Cost:** Free, but donations gratefully accepted.
- **Learn More:** http://sacredjourneyministries.com

Clark County Labyrinths

Shop Now
Eunice Schroeder sets up a temporary labyrinth annually at Vancouver’s First Presbyterian Church, but there are three permanent labyrinths on the Clark County landscape:

- Outdoors at Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, 1220 N.E. 68th St., Hazel Dell.
- Outdoors at Vancouver United Church of Christ, 1220 N.E. 68th St., Hazel Dell.
- Rooftop healing garden at Legacy Salmon Creek Medical Center, 2211 N.E. 139th St., Salmon Creek.

**Did You Know?**

According to the World Labyrinth Society (https://labyrinthsociety.org), 5,200 people celebrated the 10th annual World Labyrinth Day in May. The next World Labyrinth Day (slogan: “Walk as One at 1 p.m.”) is set for May 4.

New Year’s Day is a perfect occasion for labyrinth walking, Schroeder added.

“There are so many rituals around Christmas but not the New Year, which should be very significant,” she said. “It’s fine to watch football, but New Year’s Day is about beginnings and endings, and that’s what the labyrinth is.”

**Never lost**

A labyrinth is not a maze, Schroeder emphasized. A maze is a puzzle that’s meant to confuse and frustrate you with blind alleys and dead ends. It aims to test your brain with surprises and stops.

A labyrinth is a better symbol for real life, Schroeder said. It may seem like we hit blind alleys and dead ends must turn around or back out, she said, but in fact we’re always moving forward. “You’re never lost, there’s never really a dead end,” Schroeder said. “Life is that way too. That’s the beauty of the labyrinth.”

Some people like the idea of meditation, Schroeder said, but also know they can’t sit still for long. Labyrinth walking may be ideal for them, because it’s meditation in motion. “It’s an embodied form of prayer,” Schroeder said. “You are walking around slowly and every part of you is involved — body, mind and spirit.”

Some see labyrinth walking as symbolic of our journey through time, she said. “Come with your questions, concerns, the things keeping you up at night. Come start your journey into 2019,” Schroeder said. “You can make it whatever you need it to be. There’s no right or wrong way to do it.” If you like, say hello to Schroeder at the entryway and ask for a little inspiration; she said she’s happy to provide visiting pilgrims with some spiritual prompting.

“Never lost” is a Christian thing,” Schroeder said. “It was discovered in a church, but it’s an ancient symbol from way before Christianity. People from all different religious backgrounds and people who are spiritual but not religious, they all find value in it.”

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**New Year’s Day in the Clark County landscape:**

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