

# WellesleyWeston

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2012/2013

FIVE DOLLARS



PETER BAKER/WHYKEN

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cover

PETER BAKER *photographer*

*The table is set for a holiday season filled with special gatherings of family and friends.*



WellesleyWeston



CHERYL BALIAN SCAPARROTTA *writer*

# Labyrinths

*Exploring the Path of Life*

**do you** ever feel like you're going in a hundred different directions at once? Do you struggle to find that ever-elusive quiet time? Are you looking for a fresh—or deeper—approach to life's daily challenges?

Then consider the power of a labyrinth. Often confused with a maze, a labyrinth is a walking meditative path, and serves as a moving alternative to sitting meditation. "A labyrinth is a metaphor for life," explains the Reverend Kathy Musser, Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care at the Wellesley Congregational Church (also known as the Village Church). A typical prearranged path, with only one entrance, requires no "figuring out," so one can simply walk a labyrinth to its center, traveling its bends and turns, while allowing the mind to quiet.

And there is no right or wrong way to navigate a labyrinth. "The ancient pattern of the labyrinth has crossed time, cultures, and religions throughout history and has become a universal metaphor of peace, harmony, contemplation, and healing," Musser says.

Reverend Musser has facilitated a labyrinth ministry at the Wellesley Congregational Church for almost a decade, including monthly walks and various workshops. She is also on the Board of Directors of the Labyrinth Guild of New England, which educates people about the

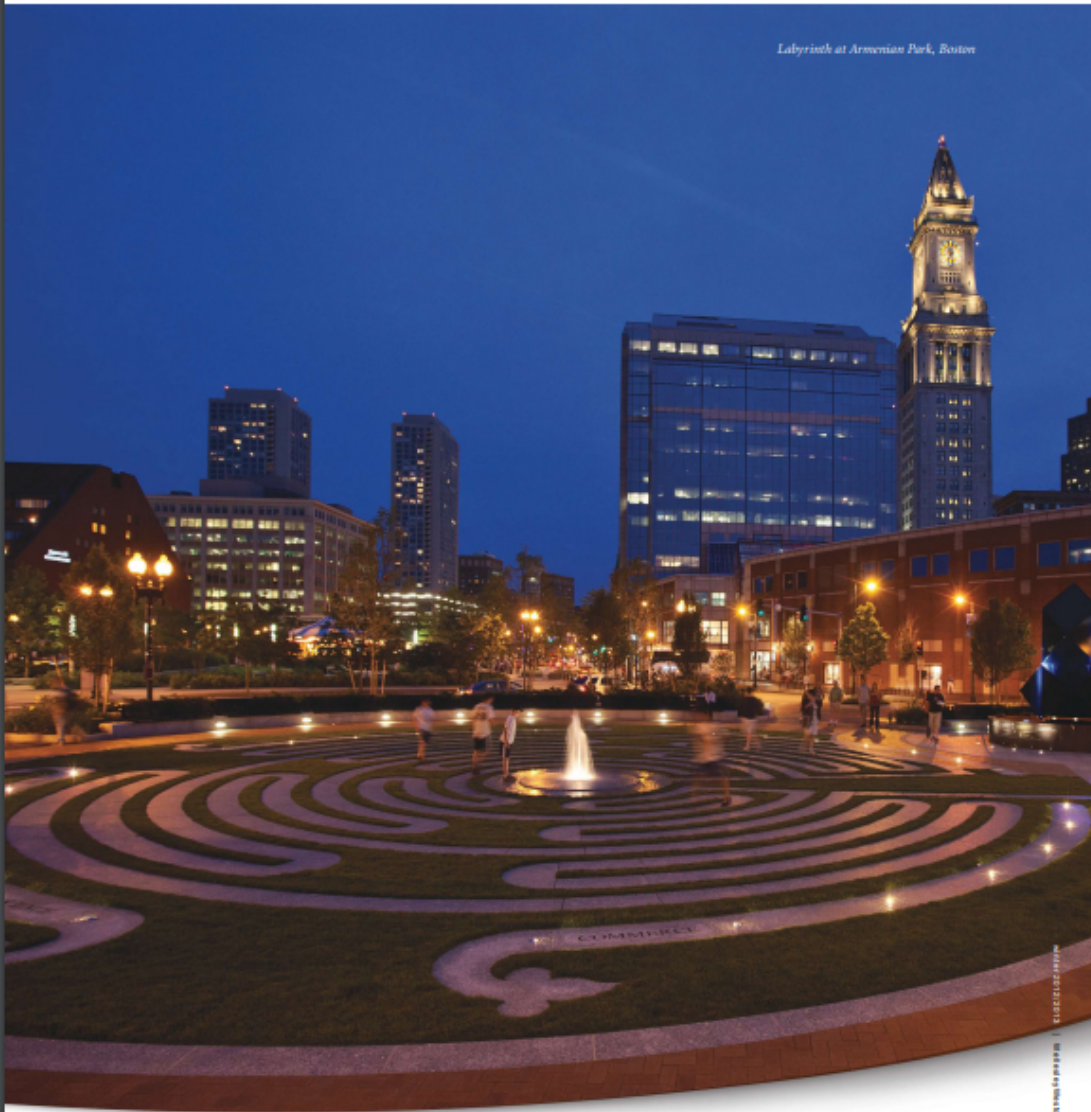
origin of labyrinths, and brings meditative walking experiences to churches, schools, and hospitals throughout New England.

"It's a simple way to demonstrate that, as humans, we are all on the path of life," adds Beth Burnham Mace, a cohort of Musser's and a co-founder of the Labyrinth Guild. "We all have a beginning and end, but life can take a circuitous path." Mace points out that there are no dead ends in a labyrinth—all paths lead to the center.

"The way we teach people to walk is to start at the beginning, follow it at your own pace and rhythm, and if you stay the course, you'll come into the center," she says. "I call it the 'path of shedding,' because it's a chance to slough off the distractions in your day-to-day world and come into a quieter mindset. When you arrive at the center, it can be a moment of insight into yourself or others."

Labyrinth designs have been found on ancient coins, embossed on pottery, etched onto cave walls, and embedded into tile floors from Roman times through the Renaissance. Perhaps the most famous labyrinth in the world today is found 50 miles outside of Paris at Chartres Cathedral, which fills the Cathedral's nave and is open to the public. Other notable labyrinths are found in Glastonbury, England;

Labyrinth at Armenian Park, Boston



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL GOODMAN FOR P&P



The Rose Kennedy Greenway, Boston, 2011

Labyrinth at Armenian Park, Boston

## Labyrinths

Gotland, Sweden; and in San Francisco (the Land's End labyrinth, which overlooks the Golden Gate Bridge). A database of historic and modern labyrinths around the globe is found via the Worldwide Labyrinth locator ([labyrinthlocator.com](http://labyrinthlocator.com)).

"The lessons are deep, but very obvious with every step we take," informs Musser. "We're all on this path together; we may not walk at the same pace, and often we may feel like we are going in different directions, sometimes in step with each other, sometimes alone. But ultimately all of us are on the same path."

### A Labyrinth that Connects the Past to the Future

The newest labyrinth to be found in the Boston area—in fact, the only one on public land—is on the Rose Kennedy Greenway near the North End. The 62-foot-wide labyrinth at Armenian Heritage Park consists of nine concentric circles with a single path leading to the center and back out. The labyrinth is part of a half-acre parcel that is a gift to the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from local Armenian-Americans, built at no cost to taxpayers.

Armenian Heritage Park is located between Faneuil Hall Marketplace and Christopher Columbus Park, and is notable not only for the stone labyrinth, but for its landscaping, seating, and an abstract sculpture positioned over a reflecting pool that will change shape



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each year (with the help of a crane) to represent the evolution of the immigrant experience.

Musser says that the inclusion of the labyrinth at Armenian Heritage Park invites all expressions of faith, culture, and ethnicity to walk the path of a diverse community together. However, the chief architect of the park, Donald J. Tellalian, AIA, says, "From my point of view, the biggest kick I get when I pass by is to see kids with their arms outstretched, racing around the labyrinth paths and squealing with delight," he enthuses. "For me, that's just as important as the thoughtfulness of walking the labyrinth."

Tellalian collaborated with a committee of a dozen varied citizens, from a university student to clergy members, a poet, and other architects including Stantec, a civil engineering and landscape architecture firm in Boston, to devise the layout of the grounds.

Large pieces of granite set in lawn form the pathways that lead visitors to the center of the labyrinth, where a single jet of water and a symbol of eternity can be found. "Within the context of the park and the celebration of the immigration experience, it's entirely appropriate to have a significant element like a labyrinth that represents the journey of life," Tellalian says.

In fact, Mace has been facilitating monthly walks at Armenian Heritage Park's labyrinth. "Every experience is so different," she says. "It's wonderful to see a stone design embedded in grass come alive and be so dynamic, when 20 people are walking it at a time. You can see the energy and the curiosity of not only children, but the adults as well."

At a recent organized walk, it wasn't only tourists on their way to the North End or Faneuil Hall who traversed the labyrinth. "One participant had a flashback into a childhood memory of walking with her

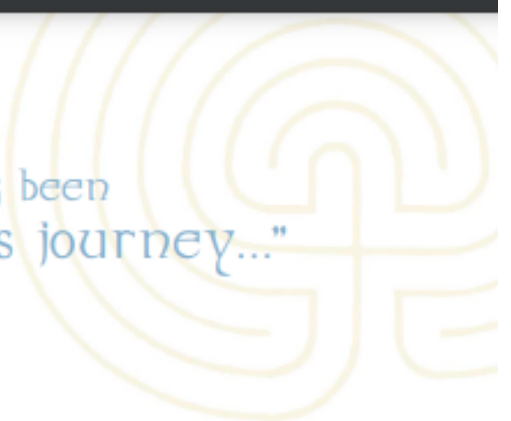
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"Labyrinths have long been  
a symbol of life's journey..."



mother in Armenia when she was little," Mace recalls. "This person was quite affected by it."

#### Limited Freedom, Limitless Insight

Among their many forays, Musser, Mace, and their colleagues have brought a canvas labyrinth into a women's prison for two-hour workshops. "It has been a very profound and humbling experience," Mace says. "I have felt privileged to be able to offer the inmates a place of quiet and reflection that they may not have access to otherwise."

During one exercise, the incarcerated women were asked to write down on paper something which no longer served them, walk that paper into the center of the labyrinth, and leave it there. The inmates were also asked to think about what they would need once they were released—courage, a plan of success, or support systems, for example. After each one concluded her labyrinth walk, the group gathered to discuss the experience.

"The response from the inmates is so appreciative, and often we're able to witness moments of peace and insights into their own lives," Mace reflects.

Another notable labyrinth in the Boston area is the Memorial Labyrinth on the cam-

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Labyrinths

## Resources

- LABYRINTH GUILD OF NEW ENGLAND  
[www.labyrinthguild.org](http://www.labyrinthguild.org)
- ARMENIAN HERITAGE PARK  
[www.armenianheritagepark.org](http://www.armenianheritagepark.org)
- TELLALIAN ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS, LLC  
[www.taap.com](http://www.taap.com)
- STANTEC  
[www.stantec.com](http://www.stantec.com)
- BOSTON COLLEGE MEMORIAL LABYRINTH  
[www.bc.edu/alumni/association/labyrinth.html](http://www.bc.edu/alumni/association/labyrinth.html)
- WORLDWIDE LABYRINTH LOCATOR  
[labyrinthlocator.com](http://labyrinthlocator.com)

*Labyrinth in the Barrett Chapel at the Wellesley Congregational Church*

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pus of Boston College, a 50-foot-wide stone circle dedicated to 22 BC alumni who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Located behind Burns Library (at the corner of Commonwealth Avenue and College Road), its 600 bluestones form a copy of the 13th-century labyrinth found at Chartres Cathedral. BC's version is encircled by the names of the lost members of their community, inscribed around the outer ring.

"Labyrinths have long been a symbol of life's journey, and in medieval times they became associated in the Christian religious imagination with the pilgrimage to Jerusalem," says University President William P. Leahy, SJ. "Our labyrinth was built in loving memory, and may it forever be a place of healing, consolation, and peace."

Aficionados are quick to point out that the journey to a labyrinth's center isn't the end point of the experience—by following the same path back out, it's hoped that individuals can bring their own insight or peace back into the world. "People might find the same sort of quiet and peace when they walk in the woods, engage in yoga, or within a religious setting," Mace points out, but "a labyrinth is simply another way for individuals to get into that sometimes elusive deep space."