



LEADERS GUIDE

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Youth For Christ

British Youth For Christ is one of over 120 Youth For Christ ministries in operation worldwide. It aims to take the good news relevantly to every young person in Britain, through schools work, youth clubs and church related youthwork, detached youthwork, nightclub ministry, prison ministry and other mission activity. It is 'linked' to around 400 churches throughout the country, and aims to serve the local church by investing in and equipping church-based youth workers.

YFC also trains and deploys young adults in Christian ministry, including 'year out' itinerant creative arts and sports teams for mission to schools and local communities. The Labyrinth UK tour 2001-2003 is one such activity.



Thanks to:

Kevin, Ana and Brian Draper for first introducing the labyrinth to us - what a gift!

All at Grace, Epicentre and Live On Planet Earth for the gift of your friendship, imagination and inspiration.

All those fellow travellers involved in alternative/creative worship around the globe who continue to explore the Christian faith through contemporary culture, arts and media and who have inspired, encouraged and supported us on our journey.

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All fellow travellers on the journey towards God, and to God who paradoxically journeys with us.

May the road rise up to meet you!



1. INTRODUCTION TO THE LABYRINTH

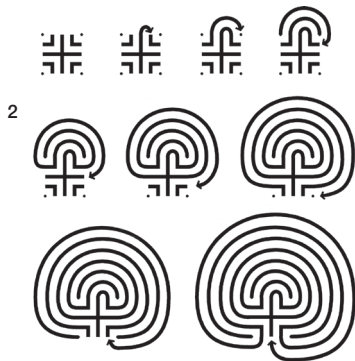
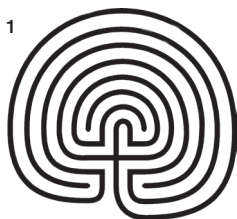
March 2000, St. Paul's Cathedral, London - something strange is happening beneath Wren's famous dome. The floor by Lord Nelson's monument is covered with sand-coloured fabric, bearing a complex design of white zigzag lines. Businessmen, barefoot, move silently from television set to mirror to sandpit. The only sound is the periodic splash of pebble dropped from hand into water. What is going on? The tourists and prayer-seekers are bemused, asking explanations from the people at the nearby desk. Many of them in their turn take off their shoes, receive a small CD player and step onto the fabric, into the labyrinth. They are going on a journey. Onlookers hear nothing, but see faces change, relax, pray. They see people who 'only had a minute' spend an hour. They see jokey teens grow serious, and elderly women smile. They see nuns getting lost, and priests coming back for more. Only the labyrinth team read the visitors' book, and know about the encounters with God, the renewed commitments and vision, the joy and wonder. Expecting a mixed reaction, controversy maybe, they are stunned by the overwhelming success.

This guide will help you create the labyrinth for yourself. It may look like a lot of time and effort, and it is, but worship was always meant to be an extravagant commitment, and the rewards are greater than you dream. The methods and ideas that the labyrinth contains will help you to create new forms of worship for yourself. This will be just the beginning of a creative journey with God.

What is a Labyrinth?

Labyrinths and mazes

Mazes and a range of labyrinth designs are found all around the world in many cultures and civilizations. They are found carved in rock, ceramics, clay tablets, mosaics, manuscripts, stone patterns, turf, hedges, and cathedral pavements. The earliest known designs are about 3000 years old. The significance of them for the various cultures they were part of and the story of how they developed from one place to another (or simultaneously appeared in several) is often mysterious and hard to fathom. The most ancient and widespread design [1] looks complicated but can be drawn quite easily if you know the method [2].



The labyrinth has since ancient times been associated with the legend of the Minotaur, the monster half-man half-bull which dwelt in the heart of a labyrinth on the island of Crete. Theseus was able to get to the centre of the labyrinth, slay the Minotaur and find his way out again by following the thread he had trailed behind him on the way in. But the story has caused confusion ever since, because clearly the Minotaur's lair was a maze that you could get lost in, whereas a labyrinth, however confusing it looks, has only one twisting path that weaves its way to the centre and back out again. There is only one entrance and exit, no dead ends, and no crossing of paths with a choice of which way to turn.

Cathedral Labyrinths

The Romans adapted the ancient labyrinth symbol as a decorative floor pattern, and the Christian artists and thinkers of early medieval times developed the Roman pattern into a new and beautiful form which was used as a feature in many medieval cathedrals. It was marked out on the floor in coloured stone or tiles and usually between 3 and 13 metres in diameter. A range of designs were explored, but the pattern used at Chartres Cathedral in northern France is the archetype and perfection of all medieval labyrinths [3]. Fortunately it has been well-preserved, and in recent times pilgrims have taken to travelling to Chartres specifically to walk it.

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Whilst we cannot be exactly sure what the labyrinths were used for, they were clearly a symbol of the Christian way, representing the path of the soul through life. Medieval pilgrims re-enacted this, following the path of the labyrinth in the cathedral on their knees as a means of prayer, or to symbolise the journey to Jerusalem, or as a ritual to mark the end of a pilgrimage. People walked it on the eve of their baptism or confirmation, as an aid to contemplative prayer in Holy Week, and as an illustration both of the life of the Christian and of the life of Christ. But after medieval times the spiritual uses of labyrinths were forgotten, and they fell into disuse. Many were destroyed between the 17th and 19th centuries.

Contemporary Labyrinths

In recent years labyrinths have been rediscovered as a Christian spiritual tool, most notably through the work of Dr. Lauren Artress at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, which has had worldwide influence. The labyrinths of the current revival have mostly been based on the Chartres pattern, although often adapted to suit circumstances. Many of the new wave of Christian 'alternative worship' groups in the UK, Australia and New Zealand have incorporated labyrinths into the forms of worship that they are pioneering.


This Labyrinth

In 1998-99 a number of alternative worship groups in the London area came together to work on an event to mark the Millennium in our city. Several of us had been involved in doing labyrinth services at a number of locations with a wide range of people and it was decided to make a labyrinth the main focus of our Millennium events. St. Paul's Cathedral let us use their south transept for a week in March 2000 as a venue. The opportunities and constraints of working in the cathedral meant that a new form of labyrinth was required, designed especially to fit the space and to offer the best experience to the tourists and pilgrims who would encounter it. Various groups of us worked on the music, the artwork, the words used in the meditations and prayers, and the design and layout.




The result is a contemporary version of a cathedral labyrinth which combines ancient Christian tradition with modern music, meditations, art, media and activities at intervals along the path. Several features are unique to the design:

- It is a new labyrinth pattern rather than one of the old patterns - with straight lines instead of curves which make it much easier to mark out.
- It incorporates 'stations' and activities en route.
- To walk it the participant listens to a series of music tracks with spoken meditations on a personal CD player. It can also be staged with meditations spoken live over backing music.
- It blends the ancient practice of labyrinth walking with contemporary popular culture - music, televisions, computers and things from everyday life. This use of what might be termed 'icons of the present' suggests that the holy can be represented in the language of the here-and-now, of which popular culture is a significant part. God meets us in the stuff of everyday life, in the real world.



The result is not, in any normal sense, a church service, but an interactive environment resembling a contemporary art installation, self-evidently constructed and playful, with visitors coming and going as they please during opening hours. However, this installation offers more than an aesthetic experience - it takes the participants on a spiritual journey.



Themes

The Labyrinth explores a number of themes, which are considered in greater depth in part 2 of this book:

Journey - we are all 'journeying' in our relationships. The labyrinth gives us the space to explore the highs and lows of our journeys and to commit ourselves to journey onward.


Letting go - many of us live lives that are stressful and over-busy. The labyrinth is an opportunity to symbolically 'let go' of the busyness that may spoil our relationships.

Centering - the journey around the labyrinth can symbolise a desire on our part to centre and focus our lives on God. At the centre we are free to meet God, sit and rest for a while.

Incarnation - in the original 'incarnation' God came as Christ to share our experience of human existence. As we journey back out of the labyrinth, carrying something of our encounter with God, we are encouraged to be God's 'incarnation' in our own lives and world.


Space and time

This form of labyrinth takes about an hour to walk. It is possible to do it in less time, but the experience may lose some of its value. The intention of the labyrinth is to give space and time for spiritual and personal reflection in a world which crowds it out. Participants can start and finish their




journey whenever they wish within the time that the labyrinth is open. They are free to proceed at their own pace, to linger, speed up, do things several times or miss them out altogether.

The approach is explicitly Christian but without threat for non-Christians, touching current concerns for relationships, ecology and personal wholeness. The language used is contemporary and non-religious, metaphorical and intriguing, inviting but leaving the listener free to make their own response. It is designed to encourage people to open up to God, without determining what the content of the encounter should be. For instance, it makes space for letting go without dictating what should be let go of, it makes space for repentance without dictating what should be repented of. Nobody is obliged to do either.



It is essential that this sense of freedom and safety from outside pressures be maintained, since it is the key to genuine openness and vulnerability before God. The labyrinth cannot, therefore, be used as a tool for overt evangelism, although by bringing about encounters with God it may do the work of evangelism. Any attempt to produce a defined result, such as conversion, will frustrate its own intentions by causing people to put their guard up and make conventional rather than genuine responses. Indeed, if people sense that something will be 'done' to them by the labyrinth they will not take part at all. The only result that should be hoped and prayed for is that participants walk willingly with God. All else is in the hands of the parties concerned!




2. LABYRINTH THEORY AND THEOLOGY

Theology is talk about God. This means the Labyrinth is theological, because it has plenty to say about God. Creation, the Trinity, the Incarnation, relationships, journey, redemption, transcendence and immanence, encountering God, being transformed - these are some of the themes incorporated into the meditations. There is nothing unorthodox or surprising here. But rather than explaining these themes in a rational and didactic way, the language used and the whole labyrinth experience are full of imagination, artistic endeavour, images, symbols and metaphors that are evocative of the Holy, but retain some sense of mystery, that God cannot be fully explained. This type of language resonates with many of the spiritual seekers in our times who will willingly linger with the different dimensions to religious awareness afforded by things like candles, icons, silence, Gregorian chants and hints of mysticism.

The labyrinth is a fusion of the ancient and the (post)modern, of prayer, contemplation, encounter and self-discovery. It is a symbolic journey towards an encounter with God. We walk the labyrinth trusting that on our journey we will be challenged and changed. As we make ourselves vulnerable we trust our gentle and loving Lord [Is. 42:3] that we will be empowered and refreshed.

The alternative worship groups who have contributed to the Labyrinth are part of a growing number across the world trying to develop new ways of worshipping that connect more effectively with the growing numbers of



people disaffected by church. At the same time we are trying to be real and honest to our own backgrounds - many of us have been raised in traditional churches but for a variety of reasons tend to feel alienated (particularly culturally) from mainstream Church. We have both maintained our links with mainstream churches and retained a traditional biblical theology, whilst at the same time trying to renew a sense of creative artistic development and cultural interaction in the way we worship, reflecting our interest in contemporary music and art.

Each particular group tends to have a variety of theological influences, but perhaps the key theologians who have affected our thinking and consequently the content of the labyrinth are Mike Riddell, Pete Ward and Professor Colin Gunton.



Relationship

Many of us had been brought up within denominations that tended to emphasise the transactional nature of our relationship with God. Whilst our traditions spoke of the need for a renewed relationship with God, the reality was that the gospel often became distilled into a contract. Somewhere along the way the focus of a living vibrant relationship with God became lost.

Gunton's book 'The One the Three and The Many' outlines four main areas of relationship which characterise our lives. These are our relationships to ourselves, others, the planet/creation and to God. He describes the relationship within the Trinitarian Godhead as a model of community which we could readily use as an archetype for our patterns of relationship

in these four areas. This framework has in turn helped to inform our adaptation of the labyrinth which encompasses all four areas of relationship.

Journey

Mike Riddell's book 'Godzone' provides an excellent outline of the concept of faith and relationship with God as a journey. In recent years missiologists have begun to embrace the theme of journey as being particularly helpful in understanding conversion. The metaphor of pilgrimage has come to serve as a timely reminder and a balance to another metaphor - that of the 'two kingdoms'. Some elements of the Church have tended to emphasise that you are either 'in' or 'out' of the Kingdom of God, often on the basis of affiliation to church (and in some more arrogant cases, to a particular denomination). In the history of Israel and in the preaching of Jesus we see evidence of both metaphors. In rediscovering the idea of pilgrimage - of being on a spiritual journey - we owe much to the postmodern emphasis on process. So, we can view salvation as more of a process than a one-off event in our lives.

This means simply that we acknowledge the reality that, for most people, becoming a Christian is a process which is occasionally punctuated by moments of crisis. Such observations affect not only the shape of our approach to mission but also our worship. This is no aimless or meaningless wandering that we are on: we have a goal, of a restored relationship with God. Many of us can look back on moments in our lives, even before we may have called ourselves 'Christian', when we were being drawn Godward by the Holy Spirit. We were already on a pilgrimage toward God. Often such moments occur in the context of Christian worship. Similarly,



many of us brought up in 'Christian homes' may remember years and years of Sunday schools and youth groups before we made any kind of explicit 'commitment to Christ'.

Incorporating the theme of journey within our missiology allows for a more creative and dialectic approach. We can recognise that we are all on this spiritual journey together - and just as different people are at different places on the labyrinth so we are at different places in our spiritual journey. Consequently we do not have to allow a separatist mentality to permeate our attitude towards others. The labyrinth involves a physical journey or walk which reflects an inner or spiritual journey which we all make. It is equally appropriate to all, whatever stage of the journey we might find ourselves on. The labyrinth gives us the space to explore the highs and lows of our journeys and our relationships with God, each other, ourselves and creation and to commit ourselves to journey onward.

The labyrinth is gentle and non-coercive. it is not ostensibly an evangelistic tool - though people have been known to say that they have 'found faith' while walking it. It is designed to be responsive to individual needs - wherever people are in their spiritual journey it encourages them to open up to God for healing and change. For people without Christian faith or with tenuous or uncertain belief, the labyrinth provides an unthreatening entry to a potential encounter with God and to ideas of God's love, grace, forgiveness, creativity etc. However it is also true to say that committed and experienced Christians can use the labyrinth to explore deeper. For the committed this is a place of prayer, a ritual, a discipline, a self-examination before God and a place of re-commitment to God. Furthermore the laby-



labyrinth actually helps to deconstruct the notion that once we have become a Christian we have 'arrived' - rather it can inspire each of us to journey onwards a little more.

Thus the labyrinth as a worship experience allows us all to literally walk in solidarity with one another recognising that we are committed to journey onwards in our relationships. Long-established Christians, and those exploring the Christian faith, and lapsed followers can all walk together. As we walk the labyrinth together we not only move closer to God in our relationship with Him but we also move closer in our understanding of one another and in our relationships.

The labyrinth allows for a personal encounter with God. We have control of the pace of travel and the depth to which we commit ourselves. We have the choice of whether to take part in each activity, and how far to go. So we can feel safe, and that sense of safety allows us to open up without fear - open up to God, and to our own inner processes. Nobody is forced or obliged to respond in a particular way. The labyrinth offers the freedom to choose - to choose to change, or not to change. Such freedom can bring about much deeper and more lasting effects on our relationships.

Clearly the nature of the journey around the labyrinth will be unique to each person, reflecting their own personality, life history and spiritual state. There are no standard or expected responses or 'results'. Rather we trust God who knows what's happening in people's hearts and lives, and we



trust the Holy Spirit to interact with each person. Remember that some people may not find the labyrinth helpful (generally we have found that only a very small percentage find it a negative experience), or it might provoke a reaction that only bears fruit at some future time in their lives. It would probably be helpful if you try to ensure that you do not compromise the sense of safety, freedom and privacy as we believe this is one of the real strengths of the labyrinth.

As well as the two underlying themes of journey and relationship there are three themes that specifically link with the the three sections of the labyrinth:

- the inward journey - 'letting go' or shedding
- the middle of the labyrinth - 'centering'
- the outward journey - 'incarnation'

Letting go

In a culture which is getting ever-busier, in which we are ever more bombarded by advertisements and images and in which you can't even wait for a train at some stations or fill up with petrol at some garages without being exposed to the TV - and in a society which is demanding longer working hours and in which you get less quality time with yourself, others and indeed God - the idea of having 'space' is becoming crucial.

We need space. Time to contemplate and meditate - time to stop is, in fact, becoming a rare commodity. Even in our sleep we are processing the



busyness of the day and trying to cope with it. Like the TV, it seems almost impossible to switch off.

It is peculiar how many church services mirror the world outside. There is often a lot of noise and a degree of general chaos. While of course we should want to be relevant, we also need to be counter-cultural. On the labyrinth we can counter the culture by promoting the idea of sacred space, to give people the time, the peace, the quiet and the reflection that they just don't get outside. The time for prayer and worship. The time to think about the things that really count. 'Within your temple, O Lord, we meditate on your unfailing love', writes the Psalmist (Ps. 48:9). But do we? Many of us live lives that are stressful and over-busy.

The labyrinth is an opportunity to symbolically 'let go' of the busyness for a while, to be still and listen, to ourselves and to God. We do not encourage people to ignore or forget their day-to-day problems on the labyrinth; rather, by highlighting such concerns we allow them to be specifically brought before God and then set aside for a while. This is no escapist spirituality - the aim is that we might come out at the end of it better able to live out our real lives as real people and to incarnate (verb) Christ to others.

The process of 'letting go' is also akin to repentance. However it is framed in a way that empowers the person walking the labyrinth rather than crushing them and as ever is focused on the goal of renewed relationship. We make a positive decision and choose to let go and move on from the patterns of behaviour that spoil our relationships (with others, ourselves,



the planet and God). Again such a process is part of the preparation to 'meet with God', it is about clearing away the clutter.

Letting go is also about forgiveness. As we walk the labyrinth we are given the chance to remember and begin to let go of the hurtful things others have done to us. We remember that as we have been forgiven our sins so we should forgive others. Again this helps to begin to clear away things that may prevent relationship. This part of the labyrinth may expose some painful memories and can potentially be rather traumatic, however we believe that the process of forgiving others is an essential element of our Christian faith.

Centering

The journey around the labyrinth can symbolise a desire on our part to centre and focus our lives on God. The centre of the labyrinth symbolises God as the axis of our lives, the central point around which our lives revolve. After the process of letting go on the inward journey we should be more easily able to sit quietly at the centre of the labyrinth where we are free to listen and rest for a while.

The light or candle at the centre connects with the Christian symbolism of the Logos or Christ as the life-light. We are drawn towards our encounter with God by the light which both guides and warms us, just as a seed gives out shoots and bursts out of the ground as it experiences the warmth of the Spring sunshine.

We come before God at the centre of the labyrinth not with any fixed ideas or expectations but rather to be still and relax, to listen to the stillness and




to enjoy the moment like a rest at the top of a mountain before the descent back down into the real world.

Incarnation


Many of us involved in the labyrinth project have been influenced and helped by Pete Ward's work on incarnational theology. The idea is that as we care for and love others we live out Christ's love for the world. In the original 'incarnation' the Word or Logos became flesh and came to share our experience of human existence. As we journey back out of the labyrinth, carrying something of our encounter with God, we are encouraged to be God's 'incarnation' in our own lives and world.

The labyrinth is a semi-therapeutic environment - we make no apologies for this, but it is not intended to be an individualistic or purely self-gratifying experience (unlike the worst excesses of some forms of therapy). Rather the aim is to equip us to be more authentically human people and consequently relate in a more Christ-like way in all our relationships. As David Steindl-Rast has said, "An individual is defined by what distinguishes it from other individuals. A person is defined by the relationship to others. We are born as individuals, but our task is to become persons, by deeper and more intricate, more highly developed relationships. There is no limit to our becoming more truly personal."

But incarnation has wider implications than the personal. We are all formed as people by the culture and times we live in, and incarnation is always incarnation into a particular time, place and culture. God in Christ was incarnate in a specific culture at a specific time, Palestine in the 1st



century, and framed the gospel in ways that were drawn from that culture and which connected vividly with the real lives of the people around him. This is given to us as our example, and we are called, like every generation of Christians, to embody (and not just talk about) Christ and the gospel in ways that connect vividly with the real life of our own time and place. Sometimes, like Christ, like the New Testament church, we may be called to embody the deep truths of God in ways that renew their relevance but which at the time seem like a startling break with the inherited forms of religion. The labyrinth demonstrates this creative embodiment into contemporary culture in many ways: in the use of TVs, computers, CDs, the electronic media that are a normal part of our lives; new metaphors such as the oscilloscope line, compass and magnets; the use of contemporary non-religious language and thought-forms; the emphasis on discovery and learning rather than a lecture room model of teaching. And yet it remains anchored in the tradition.



Incarnation into a culture is no superficial thing - it is not achieved by changing the media or the words to suit the fashion. It grows out of an honest and clear-sighted living in the culture of our times, in the sure confidence that the God of all times and places is at work in it, and is waiting, hoping, for people to discern the signs and join in.

Transformation

Walking a labyrinth changes people. It has a transforming effect. People can and do have very powerful experiences and encounters with God. Having done labyrinths for a few years now, the comments that have been written in the visitors' books suggest stories of people meeting Christ for

the first time, being healed, discovering something important about themselves, slowing down, letting go of hurt, being forgiven, gaining some perspective on life, discovering that God loves and accepts them. It is a mystery why the labyrinth is such a powerful tool for transformation, but it does work. It always takes us by surprise just how profound the experience can be for people. (Of course there are also those for whom it makes no impression or change whatsoever).

Most alternative worship services incorporate some sort of ritual or symbolic act. Often, having explored a particular theme, it is a ritual that really seals what has taken place and draws a service together. God seems to meet us in a special way in ritual. It opens up a window in the soul and the community through which the breeze of the Spirit can blow. It moves worship from the head to the heart. A lot of youth worship has discovered the same thing. In the culture generally there is a resurgence of interest in ritual, even a hunger for it. Walking a labyrinth is a ritual that directly appeals to this hunger.

In the centuries since the Reformation, especially in the Protestant tradition, we have developed an intellectualised form of religion which crams the brain while leaving the body slumped in the pew. But ritual challenges the pew potato in all of us, and demands that we get involved. It reminds us that we have bodies created by God, and that we need to put the whole of ourselves into worship. Worship goes from being something done for us to being something we do for ourselves - and in doing it for ourselves, we are changed.



It is hard to explain what exactly happens or how people are changed, but good ritual is definitely more than just a symbol of something. In communion, for example, we don't just symbolise feeding on Christ - in eating the bread and drinking the wine we do feed on him. In the labyrinth the simple act of dropping a stone in water to let go of pressures and concerns at the 'letting go' station does not merely communicate the need to let go. It produces a person freed from pressure in and through the act itself. Or the act of walking slowly round the labyrinth with God, rather than the usual rushing alone in urban life, doesn't merely communicate the need to slow down, it is generative of a slowed down person aware of God's presence in life. It is in this sense that people are transformed.

Another powerful effect of the labyrinth is that people carry the schemes used in the labyrinth back into their lives. This is why the use of popular culture and everyday things is so helpful. For example, in the 'self' station the walker stops to hear some verses affirming their uniqueness from Psalm 139 as they look in a mirror. The next time they look in a mirror, they may well see themselves in a new way. An image as simple as the sound-line on the televisions at the 'noise' station, may well linger in the mind and be a way of interpreting what happens back in the real world. People may listen to the CD and meditations back at home to further this experience. While recognising the power of ritual itself, the transforming effects are more than just a constructed experience. The transformation is also affected by the Spirit of God whose presence is real and who comes to us, as always, cloaked in cultural forms. The labyrinth will enable people to open up to God's presence. For this reason it is clearly important to offer



the labyrinth to God in prayer and invite God to come and be present, and to pray for those who will be walking the labyrinth. The powerful transforming effect of walking the labyrinth then does no less than produce new persons, enabled to see the world and act in it in a new way.

The accusation could be made (and has been made) that the labyrinth is manipulative. However, for this to be so assumes that the walkers are easily duped. This is far from the case. The labyrinth actually involves a mix of consent (at least enough consent to walk the labyrinth in the first place) and resistance from participants. There are many ways in which participants can and have resisted aspects of the labyrinth, whether skipping parts, disagreeing with them (and then writing what they don't like in the visitors book), or repeating parts several times. Because of the many ways of interpreting the symbols they are also able to create various levels of meaning relating to their own situations and lives. Ritual doesn't function as an instrument of heavy-handed social control. Ritual symbols and meanings are too indeterminate to lend themselves to any simple process of instilling fixed ideas.

One last aspect of transformation that is worth considering is that as well as transforming individuals, ritual is an effective means of changing the Church itself. The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual practice within the Christian tradition which this version changes in ways that connect with contemporary culture. It is an example of struggling with and reforming tradition to carry it forward faithfully. This may help the Church realise that faith can connect with and needs to connect with contemporary culture. Sometimes there is a tendency in church to treat contemporary culture as an enemy, but here it becomes a place where God is happy to dwell.



3. MAKING & RUNNING
YOUR OWN LABYRINTH

There are two basic ways to run the labyrinth: with personal CD players, and with live spoken meditations.

With CD players:

The meditations, instructions and background music are on a CD. Each participant is given a personal CD player and walks round listening on headphones. This form was invented for use in situations where it is not possible or desirable to have music out loud. It offers the pleasure of being immersed in your own soundworld, on a deeply personal journey with God.

Advantages:

- *can be used in situations where music cannot be played out loud*
- *reduces distractions, works well in busy or fairly noisy environments*
- *emphasises personal journey*
- *a sense of intimacy and intensity*
- *personal control over what happens - you can always switch it off*
- *specific parts can be repeated at will or skipped*
- *team not involved in what happens when you're on the labyrinth - no leaders, no pressure or intrusion*
- *people can begin at any time and have the complete experience*
- *easy to run indefinitely*
- *accessible to people who are strangers to one another - no sense of intrusion upon a group event or need to feel part of a group*
- *ideal for people who have difficulty reading*

Disadvantages:

- *need to provide sufficient CDs and players*
- *staff required at all times to give out and take back CD players, and keep them in running order*
- *some people have difficulty with controls of players or wearing headphones*
- *less sense of communal experience*
- *participants do not interact or communicate with one another*
- *onlookers take no part and cannot tell what is happening without explanation*
- *inability of onlookers to hear what is happening can cause apprehension or uncertainty about taking part*
- *emphasises the stations at the expense of the walk - the CD track structure can cause people to treat the labyrinth as a series of linked stations, waiting at each one until the track ends and then hurrying along the path to the next one.*

With live spoken meditations:

The instructions and meditations for specific parts of the labyrinth are written out and placed at the appropriate points - these can be found on the website www.labyrinth.org.uk in the 'guided tour' section. An 'overarching' meditation on general themes of the labyrinth is spoken slowly by a member of the team over background music. The music shapes the atmosphere, and participants tune in or out of the overarching meditation as they wish while they walk the labyrinth. This is the original form from which the CD version was developed.

Advantages:

- *emphasises communal experience*
- *music in any desired style*
- *stations and labyrinth contents can be varied to suit*
- *overall theme and style of labyrinth can be varied*
- *musical continuity emphasises that the path is as important as the stations - no break between tracks to tempt people to rush*
- *onlookers and team can participate in the experience*

Disadvantages:

- *difficult to run for very long periods due to continuous need for person to speak overarching meditation.*
- *need to read instructions may cause problems with lighting*
- *several people all wanting to read same thing at once*
- *not good for people with reading difficulties eg poor eyesight, dyslexia*
- *less integration between music, words and place in the labyrinth*
- *needs acoustic separation from other activities*
- *onlookers may be happy to watch and listen without getting involved - less incentive to actually do the labyrinth.*
- *strangers may feel they are intruding upon a 'church service'*
- *team more visibly 'in control' of the experience, strangers may feel uneasy or constrained*

In conclusion it could be said that the CD version resembles an art installation with guided tour, while the 'live meditations' version is more obviously a religious ritual. Which form is most appropriate will depend on the nature of the event and the audience it hopes to attract. The following sections deal with both forms, pointing out differences where appropriate.

The labyrinth space:

Size of space required:

The labyrinth itself requires 10.5m x 8m clear flat floorspace, but there should be additional space around the entrance/exit. If you choose to make a labyrinth cloth the space will need to be without columns or other interruptions, but if you tape the path on the floor these can perhaps be worked around.

If you have a smaller space see 'Other labyrinth designs and alternatives' for how to make a labyrinth to fit.

Lighting:

The lighting should concentrate attention on the labyrinth itself. There are several possibilities - the overall lighting can be quite low, with the space outside the labyrinth left in darkness and the stations lit more brightly. The lighting can be bright and even across the whole labyrinth, it can take place in broad daylight, but whatever you do should reinforce the sense that the labyrinth is holy ground.

Sound:


With CD players:

If you are using the CD players in a quiet space, it is a good idea to provide background music, loud enough to take the edge off people talking, shuffling of shoes etc, but quiet enough to be shut out by headphones at moderate volume.

With live meditations:

Take the words of tracks 1 and 7 and have someone speak them, slowly and meditatively, into a microphone over peaceful backing music, while the labyrinth is in operation. This forms an overarching meditation that the people on the labyrinth can listen to if they like, but which doesn't distract them when they are occupied or praying. The pace of reading should be much slower than the CD, with pauses between sections so that the things that have been said can sink into people's minds. In many places it will be appropriate to pause and let the music play alone for five minutes or so before resuming. When the words are finished start over again - repetition helps people to absorb what is being said, and they will not have listened continuously anyway. The backing music will create the atmosphere for the whole labyrinth, and should be chosen accordingly. Continuity of music is important - silences between tracks risk breaking the atmosphere, especially if they are accompanied by frantic efforts to change CDs! There is an art to reading meditatively over music - choose somebody who is relaxed and comfortable with public reading, can speak clearly, has a warm voice, not hard or shrill, laidback not overemphatic, and who has a sense of how to weave their words in with the tempo and mood of the music. Practice beforehand to get the feel right. This is a technique you might want to incorporate into other forms of worship, for example reading the Scriptures over music chosen to set a mood appropriate to the passage.


For both versions, choose music that creates an atmosphere of prayer and contemplation in the space, which will prepare people coming into the labyrinth and cushion those leaving. Musical genre is less important than



mood, but it is in keeping with the labyrinth if the music is contemporary. It's worth exploring outside the categories of 'religious' or 'worship' music - try the wider classical canon, or contemporary ambient chillout music.

Welcome area:

You need a place to welcome people, answer their queries, give them CD players, take their shoes and bags etc, and receive them when they have finished. It should be close to the labyrinth entrance and exit, but far enough away for no-one to be disturbed by quiet conversations and activity. It makes a place for people to watch the labyrinth and ask questions while deciding whether to take part. The welcome desk should be big enough to lay out CD players ready for use, and with room for any explanatory literature or CDs for sale. Make sure you have space to store shoes and bags securely while the owners are on the labyrinth.



Numbers of participants: (Important)

You do not want everybody who intends to do the labyrinth to turn up at once when it opens, as if it were a church service. People can only be allowed to start it a few at a time to prevent crowding, and there is a maximum number that can be on it at any time. Labyrinth events - 'service' gives the wrong idea - start gradually, run with a constant flow of people arriving and leaving for most of the duration, then wind down as people come off and you stop allowing people on. They cannot be combined meaningfully with the elements of normal worship such as group singing or public prayer - after all you won't have many people there at the beginning or left around at the end. This is a stand-alone event with its own nature.

For comfort there should be no more than 20 people on the labyrinth at once. 25 is probably the maximum allowable, but there will be crowding at the stations. It works best with 10-15 people, and can feel lonely with less than 3!


Since people take about an hour to go round, this means that at most about 150 people can do the labyrinth in a 7-hour day [bearing in mind that you cannot let them all start at once when you open, and will be winding down gradually at the end of the day].

Event publicity:

Your publicity materials should explain a little about the labyrinth and give a contact number, e-mail address or website where people can find further information. Flyers with a contact e-mail will also prove useful to give to people who want to stay in touch after they have visited the labyrinth.

Make it clear in your publicity that people can come and go at any time they please in the hours that the labyrinth is open. You do not want everybody to turn up at once at opening time, thinking it's a church service - instead you are aiming for a steady flow of visitors.

Because this resembles an art installation more than any normal church event, you can aim your publicity in that direction - get it in the arts sections of your local media. In London it was billed as 'an interactive installation for spiritual journeys', a tag intended to appeal to non-Christians and spiritual seekers as much as to Christians. Our experience was that,



placed in a religiously unthreatening environment, people of all faiths and none were willing to try it, and that God met with them.

Time:

Duration of the labyrinth

It is generally not possible to run a labyrinth for less than two hours, if a reasonable number of people are to go round with a good quality of experience. Given the effort involved in setting up you will not wish to run it for less than half a day! But there is no maximum time - once set up a labyrinth can continue indefinitely, for as long as there are helpers to run it and participants to go round.

How long people take:

Expect people to take an hour to go round.

The labyrinth should be walked slowly and prayerfully, but people can spend as much or as little time as they like at each station.

Some participants will be inclined to scurry from one activity to the next as if the labyrinth were just a fancy way of getting from A to B. This misses the point, which is to slow down and be, not just do - the walk between the stations is an essential part of the process. After all, most forms of labyrinth consist of the prayer-walk alone!

- If you are providing live meditations keep the tempo of the backing music slow.

- If you are using CD players, the music on the CD gives an idea of how fast to walk. When people are ready to move to the next station they should walk towards it while the instrumental part of the track is still playing. If they hang about for it to finish before moving on, they will have to rush to the next station to catch up with the voiceover. If they need to spend more time at a station, they can play the track again as background while doing the activity and as they walk on, then skip to the next track when they get to the next station.

Participants should always be aware of others and give them space and time. Waiting patiently for the person ahead of you to finish a station and move on is part of the experience. Overtaking is allowed, provided it doesn't disturb anyone. Discourage any rushing about.

Within reason, allow people to spend as much [or as little] time as they like. If the labyrinth must close in an hour or less, either let no new people on or warn them about the time left so they can adjust their pace. There is no point in allowing anybody to start the labyrinth nearer than half an hour to the end.

Materials required:

To make the labyrinth itself:

- If 2 inch wide duct or electrician's tape [often called 'gaffer tape'] in a contrasting colour to your floor surface. You will need 150 metres [450 feet] of tape, and it's a good idea to have plenty of extra to make repairs, tape down cables etc.

If you can't tape directly on the floor surface, or if you want to do the labyrinth more than once but can't leave it in place permanently, mark it out on fabric. The fabric needs to take tape well, to be lightweight enough to roll/fold for storage [perhaps in several sections] but heavy enough to lie flat while people walk on it. It also needs to be flameproof [you may be able to achieve this with a spray]. It is usually better to mark out with tape than paint on movable surfaces, paint may crack when the labyrinth is folded/rolled for storage.

Electrical:

- *Personal CD players* - enough to ensure a flow of people through the labyrinth without them having to wait too long for someone to finish and give one back. It might be a good idea to tell people in your pre-event publicity to bring their own player if they have one.
- *Plenty of spare batteries for the CD players*
- *Equipment for backing music* - if you are just providing background infill for the CD players version, this might be no more than a portable CD player. For live meditations you will need a full sound system with mixing

desk and good quality speakers to provide a continuous flow of music.

- *PA system for speaking live meditations - preferably linked into a mixing desk with the music.*
- *Several TV sets - a minimum of four*
- *Two VCRs*
- *Signal splitters [to send picture from VCR to more than one set] - at least one, preferably two*
- *'Noise' video loop*
- *'Planet' video loop*
- *Laptop computer with mouse. It needs to run minimum Windows 95 or Mac OS 7.5 [or later versions], with Netscape Navigator 4 or Internet Explorer 4 [or later versions] with Shockwave and Flash Plug-ins.*

Furniture:

- *Small low tables, coffee table height - at least two*
- *Two small desks or tables, high enough to sit at*
- *Two chairs*
- *A freestanding mirror, tall enough for a full-length reflection*
- *Cushions*

Garden:

- *A plant trough or large bowl, filled with soil or potting compost*
- *Seeds - large and non-poisonous, such as sunflower seeds, so that it won't matter if a child swallows one.*
- *A bowl for the seeds*
- *A children's sandpit about three feet square*

- *Clean sand*
- *A trowel*
- *Pebbles from a beach or riverbed - about 200, all sizes between about two to four inches across. Make sure they're clean.*
- *A plastic water container. Size - if you put all the pebbles in it it should only be about a third full.*
- *Bin or dustbin with lid [the lid is important]*

Stationery:

- *Plenty of paper, A5 or A6 size*
- *Pens - say twenty, colours are nice*
- *A visitors' book*
- *Inkpads, preferably two or three in different colours*
- *A plain paper pad such as an artist's sketchpad or notebook with unlined pages*

Food:

- *Fresh bread*
- *Red wine*

Various:

- *A plate for the bread*
- *A cup, glass or chalice for the wine*
- *A small cloth to wipe the lip of the cup*
- *Towels - four medium*
- *Wet wipes*

- *A large candle - but no higher than eye level for someone sitting on the floor. a three-wicked pillar candle about six inches in diameter is excellent - the three flames symbolise the Trinity, and the diameter and weight makes it stable.*
- *A compass - the large map-reading type for mountaineering or hiking*
- *Magnets - at least four, strong enough to affect the compass from about 6 inches away*
- *A map - about 3 feet square*

Optional items:

- *Playdough*
- *Sheets of white muslin-to drape around TVs, over unpleasant furniture etc. Important: make sure all muslin or other fabric used is flameproofed. You can get sprays to do this.*
- *A small vacuum cleaner - for cleaning up spilt soil, sand, seeds and crumbs at the end of the day.*

Setting up the labyrinth

The setting up team:

You need a team of at least four or five people for setting up.

Setting up time:

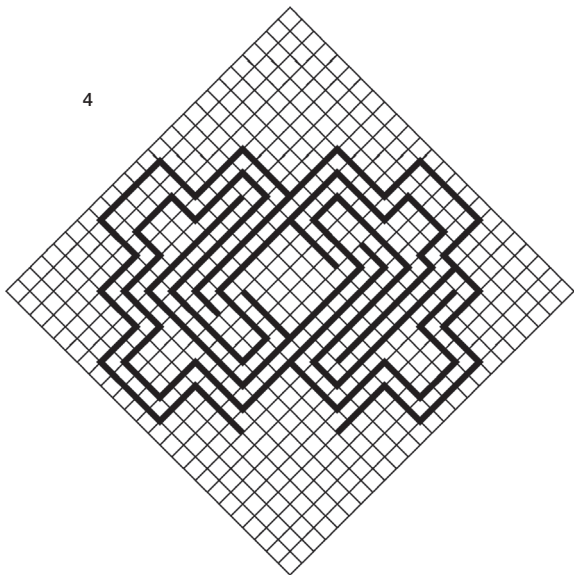
Allow at least two hours to tape out on the floor. Allow another two hours for the rest of the setting up.

If you decide to make a reusable labyrinth on a floorcovering, set aside four or five hours on a previous day to make it with three or four people. Then allow three hours for the actual setting up, including the laying out of the floorcovering in the space.

Allow enough time not to be rushed or still setting up when people arrive. It's better to allow too much time - or even set up the day before. The team will be better hosts if they are calm and relaxed!

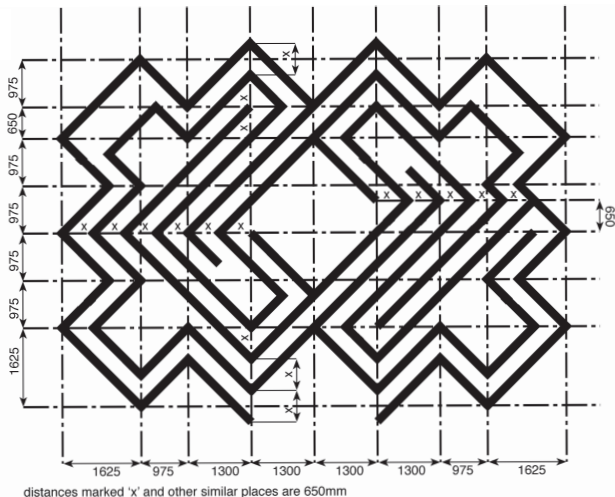
Marking out the labyrinth:

The labyrinth is designed on a grid of 460mm [18in] squares as shown in [4].



An alternative way of setting out is as diagram [5].

5



This uses a setting-out grid of string which is removed later - most of the key vertices of the labyrinth pattern are where strings cross. So instead of having to draw out the whole labyrinth first before taping it, you can see

on the string grid where the start and end points of the main lines are, and tape them directly from one point to another. The remaining bits can be worked out from the 460mm squares. Mark the entrance to the labyrinth with an arrow.

If you have made a labyrinth on a floorcovering, make sure it lies flat and wrinkle-free to prevent people tripping. Thread electrical cables underneath it and up through holes to service the stations. Then tape the edges down to hold it flat and in place.

Any exposed electrical cables should be taped down to minimise hazards and render them less obtrusive. A good way to do this is to run them along the lines of the labyrinth where possible and tape them down in the same colour tape.

Laminates [CD players version]:

When you have marked out the labyrinth, number each of the stations as shown on the plan. You can make tape numerals, but a good alternative is to print them out large on A4 paper and have them laminated. Then tape the laminates down. They are hard-wearing and reusable [remember to remove them before rolling the floor covering up, if that's how you've done it]. The numbers should be at the entrance to each station area or [for numbers 1 and 7] the relevant section of path.

Laminates [live meditations version]:

Print the text for stations 2-5 and 8-11 in large type, have the sheets laminated and place them on the labyrinth in the appropriate locations. Where the text contains both meditations and instructions it is a good idea to split it so that several people at the station can read more easily, and to encourage movement through the station. For example, on station 4 'Hurts', the first line 'The world is broken...' can go at the entrance to the station; the next parts, 'What hurtful things have been said to you?' and 'What hurtful things have been done to you?' can be separate but both by the pens and paper; and the rest, from 'Look at your symbols...', goes by the bin. Don't tape the laminates down, people may need to pick them up to read.

You can also make laminates of tracks 1 and 7, even though they will be spoken as the overarching meditation. Break the text up in a suitable manner, two or three paragraphs per sheet, and place on the path between the stations. Spread the 'Inward journey' meditation out along the whole of the inward path, from the entrance right up to the central space; spread the 'Outward journey' meditation along the entire outward path to the exit. The last sheet should be the passage from 'So where do we go from here?...' to 'Today we are going on a journey...'

For both versions, print/laminate the Visitors' Book explanation and place nearby.

Setting up the stations:

Inward journey [*track 1*] CD players version only

Purpose:

To prepare the walker for the journey.

What happens:

The walker listens to most of the track before entering the labyrinth. It paints a theological backdrop for the journey ahead, emphasising themes of journey, relationship, letting go, centering, creation, the Trinity, Incarnation, and encounter with God.

Other comments:

The track is 7 minutes long, but the section of the labyrinth from the entrance to station 2 is relatively short. It is best if people sit just outside the labyrinth and listen to 5 minutes of the track before entering. Advise people not to let the track finish before they have moved into the labyrinth, or they will have to hurry round to station 2!



Noise *[track 2]*

Purpose:

To quieten people down so that they can concentrate on the labyrinth and get into a thoughtful, prayerful frame of mind.

What happens:

Images of an oscilloscope or sound line flicker on a stack of three televisions. The walker is encouraged to reflect on internal and external noise in her own life and to place it to one side, quiet down and listen for God's signal.

Items required:

- *Several TV sets [preferably three or more]*
- *One VCR*
- *One signal splitter*
- *'Noise' video loop*

How to set them up:

Stack the TVs just outside the labyrinth facing in [so they don't occupy space inside the labyrinth]. Hide the VCR behind them. If your TVs are old

or not uniform it's a good idea to drape muslin over and around them to conceal the cabinets and wiring, leaving only the screens visible. All the screens should be running the 'noise' video loop. Remember to turn the sound off on all the TVs!

Other comments:

The 'noise' loop is filmed from an oscilloscope, which displays the waveforms of sounds picked up through a microphone.



Letting go *[track 3]*

Purpose:

To help people let go of concerns and worries to God.

What happens:

The walker takes a stone from a pile, reflects on concerns, worries, pressures in his life and imagines letting go of them and offering them to God by dropping the stone into a pool of water.



Items required:

- *The pebbles*
- *The plastic water container*
- *Two towels - not part of the station, but to dry the pebbles with when you take them out of the water after the labyrinth has closed.*


How to set them up:

Put the water container and the pebbles in their space in the labyrinth, the container on the left and the pebbles in a heap on the right. Fill the container with water to just under half full [because the water level will rise as pebbles are added].



Other comments:

We use a plastic water container because metal will clang when people drop pebbles in.



200 pebbles make a nice display and should get you through a busy day on the labyrinth without running out. After the labyrinth has closed, take them out of the water and dry them on the towels. The number of pebbles in the water will tell you how many people have done the labyrinth - although occasionally someone puts more than one pebble in.

**Hurts** *[track 4]***Purpose:**

This ritual helps people to confess and repent of hurts they have caused others, and receive God's forgiveness; it helps people to express the hurts others have done to them, and to forgive them with God's help.

What happens:

The walker draws symbols on a piece of paper to represent ways she has been hurt and ways she has hurt others. This is then screwed up and placed in the bin as a sign of confession, letting go and receiving forgiveness. Words of absolution conclude the meditation.




Items required:

- *A pile of paper*
- *Pens*
- *The bin with lid*
- *A small low table to put the pens and paper on*

How to set them up:

Put the table with pens and paper on just outside the labyrinth to make more room. Put the bin inside the station space near its exit, so that people can throw the paper in as they leave.

Other comments:



The lid on the bin keeps the contents private, and gives a sense of finality to the act of throwing away. Never, never look at the pieces of paper afterwards, or dispose of them in a place where others can look through them.

This is probably the most sensitive and private part of the labyrinth, so do not let non-participants hang around it or watch at close quarters.

Drawing symbols allows people to express hurts that are complex or hard to name. It also allows children, who may not have the words for things, to take part. This part of the labyrinth is of great value to them.



Distractions *[track 5]*

Purpose:

To prepare people to focus on God.

What happens:

There is a map, a compass and some magnets. The walker is encouraged to reflect on distractions - 'false norths' that shift his focus away from God - by moving the magnets near the compass and watching the needle being pulled away from true North. He then takes time to focus on God.

Items required:

- *The compass*
- *The magnets*
- *The map*

How to set them up:

Spread out the map in the station space. Place the compass on it somewhere in the middle, and the magnets at the edge so that they don't influence the compass needle until people start to play.

**Other comments:**

Be creative with your choice of map. It can be somewhere you know, like your neighborhood or a place you love. It can be a place you think significant, or that has meaning for you.

Depending on the map, you can add extra items to set the scene, such as hiking boots, sleeping bag, camping stove...

**Holy Space** *[track 6]***Purpose:**

A space where people can relax, be quiet and pray.

What happens:

The walker has reached the centre of the labyrinth where there is space to sit down. There is a candle with three wicks burning to symbolise the Trinity and bread and wine is available. The walker takes time to be and to receive from God.

Items required:

- *The large candle*
- *Cushions*
- *The bread on the plate*
- *The wine in the cup, glass or chalice*
- *The small cloth to wipe the lip of the cup*

How to set them up:

The candle in the centre of the space. The bread and wine next to it. The cushions scattered around the space for people to sit or lie on.

Other comments:

The candle is the symbolic presence of God and is the centre of the whole labyrinth. People in the Holy Space can take the bread and the wine as they wish - there are no instructions but most people understand. Top up supplies unobtrusively if they run low. The bread and wine are symbolic so there is no need to have them blessed.

Create an air of peace and comfort in this space. Here more than anywhere people will want to sit or lie on the floor for long periods, so if it is hard or cold cover it with rugs or throws.

If elderly or infirm people, or people with disabilities, wish to do the labyrinth it may be good to put a chair in the Holy Space so that they don't have to sit on the floor. This matters less at other stations, but people stay in the Holy Space for longer and need to be comfortable.



Outward journey [track 7] CD players version only

Purpose:

As the walker leaves the centre, this track prepares her for going back into the world, taking her encounter with God with her, and passing on what she has received.



Self [track 8]

Purpose:

To explore our relationship with our own selves in the light of God's love for us.

What happens:

The walker looks into a mirror and listens to verses from Psalm 139 and contemplates being made in God's image, being loved by God. Her uniqueness is celebrated by placing a thumbprint in an open book.

Items required:

- *The mirror*
- *A small low table*
- *The inkpads*
- *The plain paper pad or notebook*
- *The wet wipes for people to wipe the ink off their thumb*

How to set them up:

Place the mirror where there's room to stand in front of it. Put the the inkpads, wipes and the book next to it on the small table. Use the inkpads to make a few thumbprints in the book before the labyrinth opens so that people get the idea.

**Planet** [track 9]**Purpose:**

To think about our relationship to God's creation.

What happens:

A video of images of space and breathtaking waterfalls loops round as the walker is invited to contemplate his home, planet Earth. He plants a seed in soil as a symbol of love and care for creation.

Items required:

- *One large TV or several smaller ones*
- *One VCR*
- *'Planet' video loop*
- *A signal splitter if more than one TV*
- *The plant trough or large bowl, filled with soil or potting compost*
- *The seeds in their bowl*
- *Optional extra: playdough in several colours, and a smooth flat surface to make things on*

How to set them up:

Use muslin to cover the TV except for the screen, hiding the wiring and the VCR. Remember to turn the sound off. Put the planting trough and bowl of seeds next to the TV - one or other can go on top of the TV depending on size. If you have several TVs stacked it is safer to leave the other items on the floor.

If you have the playdough, the top of the TV[s] is an excellent place to put it and the things people make.

Other comments:

It's good if the soil is a little bit damp [not wet!]. Dry soil implies that you're planting the seed in a desert for it to die!

If you have the playdough, make a few things before the labyrinth opens, to give people the idea. Then leave whatever people make there for the duration of the labyrinth, even if it carries on for days, as a growing display. People can make anything, but the theme of the station is the planet and nature so the things you make to set the scene should be give a lead in that direction.

**Others** *[track 10]***Purpose:**

To reflect on our relationships with other people and to pray for them.

What happens:

A computer screen full of candles greets the walker and she is invited to think of the web of relationships within which she lives and pray for one or

two others. This is symbolised by clicking on the candle with the computer mouse which lights the candle.

Items required:

- *The laptop computer and mouse*
- *A desk or table*
- *A chair*

How to set them up:

To obtain the candles webpage:

go to www.proost.co.uk and click on 'labyrinth candles' or go to www.embody.co.uk/labyrinth and follow the instructions to download the Zipped file.

Extract the files from the Zip.

Open them in your browser.

Put the desk and chair in the station space, with the laptop on the desk and the candles page displayed.

Other comments:

It is good to have the candles page as a startup document if you are running the labyrinth for more than a day.

Keep an eye out for when all the candles on the page are lit. Then clear it by reloading the page when no-one is at the station.

Alternative version:

Use nightlight candles in place of the laptop. Provide plenty [20 or 30], and light one or two before starting. People will light the others from them. Cover the tabletop with something flameproof to protect it from heat and wax spillages. It will occasionally be necessary to blow some candles out, remove them, and provide fresh ones, when the station is unoccupied.

A table ablaze with candles carries a risk of fire or accident. You may have to obtain permission from the fire officer of the premises, and should not allow younger children near. A team member should keep watch, and a fire extinguisher should always be unobtrusively close at hand.

**Impression** *[track 11]***Purpose:**

To think about how our own lives affect the world around us.

What happens:

The walker leaves his footprints in sand and reflects on the impression or legacy he is leaving with his life.



Items required:

- *The sandpit*
- *The sand*
- *The trowel*
- *Towels*

How to set them up:

Put the sandpit in the station space and fill it with sand. Put the trowel in the sandpit to one side. Put the towels on the floor next to the sandpit.

Other comments:

The trowel is for smoothing the sand to eliminate your footprints before you leave the station. The towels are for wiping sand off your feet.

If the sand is damp it will hold a footprint better.



The visitors' book *[no track on CD]*

Purpose:

A chance for participants to make a final response to God for all that has happened on the labyrinth.



What happens:

The walker sits and writes her name, address and 'comments' in the book, to God who has been her host for the journey.

Items required:

- *The visitors' book*
- *A small desk or table*
- *A chair*
- *Pens*

How to set them up:

Put the table and chair just outside the exit from the labyrinth path, with the book and pens on the table. Leave the visitors' book open so that people can see what to do.


Other comments:

This is for people to write their final response to God - not to offer comments to the team on whether they've enjoyed the labyrinth!

It may be good for a team member to 'start' the book, so that those that follow understand what to do.

People may leave their addresses because of the format of visitors' books - but please don't make use of these for a follow-up campaign!

The team are allowed to read the entries in the book - it is often the best



feedback they will get about the experience people have had. But don't go looking through the book while the labyrinth is open - people may feel inhibited about what they write if they see that you will read it straightaway. If after the labyrinth you want to make use of some of the entries, for feeding back to a wider audience or for publicity, do so sensitively and protect the anonymity of the writers.



Running the labyrinth



Before opening:

The atmosphere should be in place when the first visitors arrive. Make sure the video loops are running, the candles are lit, the laptop is ready, the lighting is correct and the background music is playing before you allow anybody in.

When people arrive:

Many people will not have encountered a labyrinth before, and will need you to explain what it is and what to do. A simple and brief explanation that usually seems to suffice goes something like this:

[All versions]

- the labyrinth is a meditative prayer-walk with activities along the way that help you focus on aspects of your spiritual journey with God;
- the journey into the centre is about removing barriers between yourself and God;
- the centre is a place where you can pray and relax in God's presence;
- the journey out is about how your encounter with God affects your relationships with yourself, other people and the planet;

[CD players version]

- the prayers, meditations, background music and instructions for what to do are on a CD;
- you walk the labyrinth carrying a CD player and listening on headphones.
- each track on the CD relates to one part of the labyrinth, and the track numbers are marked on the floor.

[Live meditations version]

- the meditations and instructions for what to do are placed along the path;
- there is a spoken meditation in the background which is about the overall themes of the labyrinth. You can listen to it or not as you walk.

If the person is ready to do the labyrinth, ask them to leave their shoes behind, and any bags or coats which may encumber them. Taking off shoes is not a cast-iron rule - some people have problems with their feet and need to keep their shoes on - but it's needed for station 11, keeps the



labyrinth clean for sitting on the floor, and suggests a sense of holy space - "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" [Exodus 3:5]. Remind people to switch off their mobile phones, to save embarrassment later!

Explain the CD player controls if it is not their own. Advise about the length of the first track, and invite them to sit near the entrance to listen to most of it [but not all of it] before starting their walk. Advise people to use the instrumental part of each track as background to their onward walk, or listen to the track again if necessary rather than rush on to the next thing when it finishes.

Allow people to start the labyrinth at reasonable intervals, no more than three at a time. This will prevent queues and overcrowding at stations. If necessary ask people to wait - they can watch and prepare themselves, tuning into the atmosphere of the room. If a group arrives, don't let them all on at once, split them up into twos and threes.

While people are waiting:

There may be times when people have to wait more than just a few minutes - perhaps the labyrinth is busy, or a large group has arrived who cannot all be allowed on at once. It's a good idea to have a quiet café space, in a separate room but near the entrance to the labyrinth, where people can get refreshments while they wait. People who have finished will also appreciate refreshments, and a place where they can process what has happened before returning to the outside world.



When people leave:

Allow people who have just finished plenty of space. Don't question them about their experience or press them for a response - if they talk to you about it fine, if not, let them be. It is quite normal for people who have done the labyrinth not to want to talk about it straight afterwards.

It is useful to have flyers for people to take away, with a contact e-mail or website so that they can stay in touch.

Things to keep watch on while the labyrinth is running:

- the bread and wine - top up as necessary, in a quiet and unobtrusive manner. there should always be generous amounts of both.
- the videos - watch for when they need rewinding. You can ease this task by re-recording them as repeating loops that run for several hours.
- the laptop - look out for people messing with it, losing the candles page etc; and when most of the candles onscreen are lit, wait until the station is free then reload the page.

When the labyrinth has closed for the day:

- rewind the videos
- remove the bread and the wine
- blow out the candle[s]
- shut down the laptop
- turn off the TVs
- put the lids back on the inkpads
- make sure the magnets aren't left close to the compass

- take the pebbles out of the water [counting them as you do so], dry them and return them to the pile.
- clean up dirt or spills, vacuum generally

Maintaining the sanctity of the actual labyrinth space:

- don't allow non-participants to cross or enter the labyrinth
- don't allow people to run about or make a lot of noise immediately around the labyrinth
- always try to avoid breaking the concentration of people doing the labyrinth - treat it as a prayer space
- staff should only enter to adjust the stations or to give assistance
- shoes are to be removed before entering [preferably even by staff, to reinforce the point]

After the labyrinth - follow-up:

Follow-up:

CDs and guidebooks to buy:

People may ask if CDs or guidebooks are available to buy. You can either order supplies from Proost beforehand that you can sell on the spot, or have information/handouts that direct purchasers to Proost [www.proost.co.uk].

Online Labyrinth:

For an exciting continuation of the Labyrinth visit the Online Labyrinth at www.labyrinth.org.uk. This is a visually rich multimedia translation of the Labyrinth to the internet, developed by embody.co.uk who created the on-screen candles for the 'Others' station. It is based on the original soundtrack and meditations, and allows anyone in the world to take part at any time. Web visitors can complete the Labyrinth in one go or journey through it in stages.


Other labyrinth designs and alternatives:**Making a smaller labyrinth:**

You can make the labyrinth smaller by setting the squares to a smaller size, but if they are less than 300mm [1ft] square it will be difficult to walk. This also makes the areas for the stations smaller too.

Other patterns from the same geometry:


It is possible to derive other patterns from the same basic geometry as follows.

If the stations are 'collapsed' into the labyrinth we get a basic pattern. This can be slightly altered to make it square. This can then be opened up again in different ways. All these have different numbers of stations to the original labyrinth, so you will have to decide which to omit, or to invent your own [see page 72].




Some variations have a lot of path and small stations, which helps emphasise the meditative walking rather than the activities. Other variations have large stations but less path, which emphasises activities over travel. This is useful if you need to allow large groups at each station, or have children or people unused to walking meditatively who will tend to rush from station to station.

Using fewer stations:



If your pattern has fewer stations you will have to decide which to omit, and if you are using the CD players you will need to tell the participants which tracks to skip. When deciding what to omit try to keep the general shape of the labyrinth process - don't omit all the 'journey inward' stations, or all the 'journey outward' ones, but keep a balance. If more than two or three tracks are left out it may be easier to do the labyrinth without CD players to avoid confusion. Or you can invent your own stations [see 'Inventing your own labyrinth' below].



Without stations - let your walking do the talking:

Maybe you want to try out one of the historical patterns of labyrinth [see 'What is a labyrinth?' above]. These consist of the path alone, without stations. In this form the labyrinth is a walking meditation or prayer. The prayer can take many forms, but is best as a simple thought - a single matter for petition or praise - held before God as you walk slowly. The simplicity of thought and gentle bodily motion help people slow down, calm down and get attuned to God. "Be still, and know that I am God" [Psalm 46:10] - this is a good way of learning to find stillness in a world in


which we struggle to actually be still. There can still be an overarching meditation and music to maintain an atmosphere and cover distracting noises.

Inventing your own labyrinth:


You can invent your own labyrinth - different stations on the same pattern, or a different pattern too. The basics you need to remember are:

- It's a journey towards meeting God in the centre, and then out again.
- The journey in is all about dealing with the things that come between you and God.
- The centre is a place of prayer.
- The journey out is about how meeting God bears fruit in your life.

Stations should be built around simple activities that help to illustrate a mental or spiritual process. Simplicity helps people concentrate on the meaning of what they're doing, instead of the technique. Explore metaphors - the Bible is full of metaphors for the spiritual life, such as seeds, deserts, rocks, roads, water. Most of these are taken from the normal life experiences of the people of Biblical times. So look around you in your own life for new metaphors, ways that God speaks to you now - the compass is one such 'new metaphor'. The laptop candles are an old metaphor in a new form. Use your imagination - be creative! It helps the process if you can gather together a small group of people to bounce ideas around. Don't rule anything out too quickly - sometimes it's the crazy idea that cuts deepest.



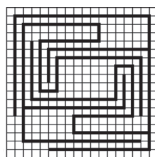
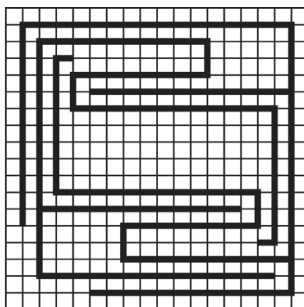
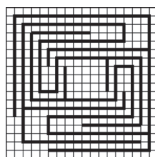
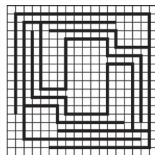
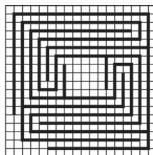
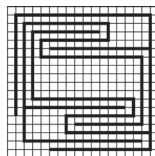
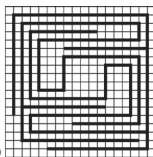
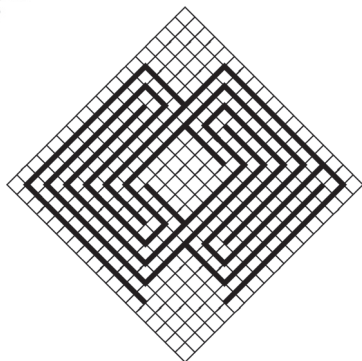
If you have invented your own labyrinth you will not be using the CD players, so follow the methods suggested for 'live meditation' labyrinths. Put written instructions for your stations or processes along the labyrinth, and create an overarching meditation over background music. The meditation should be inspirational and thought-provoking to create and sustain the mood, and contain appropriate passages from Scripture. You don't need huge amounts of material if it is read in the manner described in the 'Sound' section above. All your written material should be meditative and poetic, open and inviting. Use modern language and avoid religious clichés or theological jargon. The idea is not to hit people with slabs of doctrine but to feed their imaginations and give them room to grow freely towards God.



When creating your own labyrinth you can aim it at specific groups such as children, or tailor it to themes - how would you make a Christmas or Easter labyrinth? For instance, one for children at Christmas could have stations around seasonal themes such as angels, gifts for the baby Jesus, the animals in the stable etc, where children could make something to carry on round the labyrinth. Perhaps they could give the things they've made to Jesus in the centre, and receive something to take out. If it's for children it won't turn out meditative!

One thing to remember, though: don't reduce the path to just a complicated way of getting around. Make sure the walking stays part of the experience.





4. ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP - *THE BACKGROUND TO THE LABYRINTH*

As already mentioned in the Introduction, this labyrinth is the result of a collaboration between Christian 'alternative worship' groups, who had already staged labyrinths in different forms as part of their church activities. So what is 'alternative worship', how does it differ from more conventional church practices, what does it aim to achieve?

Alternative worship is not a style, but an approach whose stylistic implications can be very various. It is what happens when people reinvent church for themselves, in forms that fully reflect the people they are and the culture they live in. That's the people they really are and the culture they really live in, not Christianised versions suitable for church! It's an attempt to make spaces where people can be real, and relate honestly to God and one another without 'religious' masks or imposed forms of behaviour. In practice this involves a complete reappraisal of what a church service actually consists of - what it's for, how it's led, what kinds of things can happen, what kind of language is used, where people sit and what the space looks like.

Many people inside and outside the movement are dissatisfied with the term 'alternative worship'. The trouble is that it places the emphasis on only one aspect of being church, albeit the most public one. But how we worship grows out of who we think we are as Church, so any process of reinventing worship involves hard thought about what being the Body of Christ actually means, for us in our own place and time.


Why are people doing this?

The internal culture of church can be divorced from the surrounding world, seeming to outsiders quaint or alien - a thing of the past, or a strange parallel universe. Even some church members may feel that church is a separate world. They may see this as a sign of holiness, or may like the escape it offers from normal life. Or, to put it another way, churches tend to cater for people who like church. If the stylistic aspects of 'alternative worship' appear remarkable, that's just proof of how disconnected many acts of 'conventional worship' are from the surrounding culture.


This culture gap is a major factor in the collapse of church membership and the general lack of credibility of the Christian faith. Many believers feel obliged to accept a compartmented life, and get used to leaving their normal tastes and thought patterns at the door as they enter the church building. Some can only deal with the contradictions by leaving the Church altogether - others leave the outside world to live in a Christian subculture. It's sad that church, which should be a place of wholeness, can lead to split personality for its adherents.

Modernity and postmodernity


There are a number of factors involved in this cultural disconnection, such as the conservatism of institutions and a misunderstanding of what an unchanging gospel means for church practice; but the form it's taking has much to do with the shift of Western culture into postmodernity.



Modernity, the underlying cultural phase of the last two or three hundred years, centred around belief in objective and verifiable truth mediated through language as a rational and stable medium. Science, the supreme embodiment of modernity, carried all before it, and the Church was obliged to alter its discourse to suit. The questions of modernity were 'Is it true?' and 'Can it be proved objectively?'. So Christians engaged in rational arguments about proof, historicity and so forth, and non-rational aspects of the faith were an embarrassment - to say nothing of the supernatural [which is what many preferred to do]. Forms of worship during these centuries tended to be based on words and reasoned argument, doctrine sung as hymns and spoken as sermons. Rational persuasion came to be seen as the best conversion technique.



However, since the late 1960s there has been a deep cultural shift. Philosophers now recognise that all human knowledge is conditioned by culture and language, and that claims to have found universal truth should be treated with [at the least] great suspicion. The starting point for post-modernity is the realisation that all human knowledge requires an act of faith, all human truth claims are provisional, and all human understandings are incomplete.



Clearly this throws the windows open to religion, the mysterious, the supernatural, once again - faith has been relegitimised as a mode of knowledge. The growth of New Age spirituality is the response of the wider culture, an indiscriminate and consumerist attempt to satisfy inner hungers. But the Church, hampered by concerns for security and tradition,


has been slow to respond at a moment when things have changed very rapidly. In spite of the widespread concern for spirituality in our society, most people believe, tragically, that Christianity has nothing to offer.

Some theology


In order to discuss the underlying theology of alternative worship, that which distinguishes it from other kinds of Christian response to contemporary culture, it is helpful to make use of some concepts drawn from mathematical set theory. A 'closed set' is defined by a boundary - all that is inside belongs to the set, all that is outside does not. An 'open set' has no such 'territorial' boundary, but belonging is defined by relationship with a centre: all that is moving towards the centre, seeking relationship, belongs; all that is moving away, abandoning relationship, does not.

Churches that operate on a 'closed set' model attempt to define the Kingdom with a boundary, usually coincident with declared membership of the Church - in more extreme cases, membership of a particular church. 'Conversion' comes by moving people from one side of the boundary to the other. The task of the Church is to extend its boundary, to take territory for God. It encourages people across the boundary by providing a world that looks familiar while being based on a different value system.


The alternative worship movement sees membership of the Kingdom as defined by movement towards or away from Christ as centre. Clearly there are still those that belong and those that don't, but definitive separation is impossible this side of the final Judgement. Those who appear to be close



to Christ may be moving away from him, those that seem far away may be heading towards him. C.S. Lewis makes the point in 'Mere Christianity' that choosing God is an ongoing process, and that all our choices add up to a direction towards or away from God. So it might be said that the Kingdom consists of, or at least is present in, those who are moving towards Christ - following him one might say - whether they are yet conscious of it or not.



This theology has a direct effect on the alternative worship approach to the world. The concern is for direction of movement, in so far as it can be gauged, rather than declared allegiance to Christ. "You will know them by their fruit." The emphasise is on nurture rather than conquest. What already exists will be encouraged towards God, rather than being simulated by believers 'within the boundary' in the hope that people will transfer allegiance to the simulation. Alternative worshippers expect to discover the Kingdom, not impose it. Since no boundary is drawn between sacred and secular, it is not felt necessary to stick to 'Christian' music or art, or to refer only to Christian writers or thinkers, or to limit the topics that may be covered in worship, or to use approved religious language or behaviour.



Which set model is adhered to also affects attitudes towards risk-taking. For 'closed set' believers, the willingness to take risk is constrained by the danger of recrossing the boundary. For 'open set' believers, the risk is that of heading in the wrong direction. But in the absence of a hard boundary between saved and unsaved it seems less fraught to explore a new road, or to change direction on discovering one is heading away from relationship with Christ.

'Closed set' Christians tend to operate from an essentialist model, where a sizeable unchanging core of Christian doctrine or tradition need only alter its surface appearance from time to time in order to communicate to whatever society it finds itself in. It is not expected that surface change should force reevaluation of core doctrines or behaviours. These are assumed to be God-given and therefore not subject to cultural change.

Alternative worship takes a more incarnational approach. It asks what relationship with God means within this particular society, as if like Christ we were incarnate as babies, and had to learn each time our relationship to God from scratch using what means our society provides. This is an approach in tune with postmodernity, in that it assumes no universally valid form of Christianity, but many culturally specific forms, all still rooted in the Christian story and defined by the necessities of relationship with the one absolute [but not fixed] point called God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Alternative worship arose in response to felt needs rather than academic theories. So the theology has emerged in pieces through reflection on the practice of remaking church. The practice of alternative worship is itself a theological experiment, an act of research by believers into the nature of relationship with God and with the world, in which the forms of church can continually respond to discoveries made. Brueggemann described the relationship of God and his people in terms of a dance, in which what remains constant is the relationship of the parties not their positions on the dancefloor. Our models often assume that humans move while God remains fixed, but the metaphor of dance allows that God can and does move, requiring humanity to respond creatively if the dance is to continue.

A short history

The term 'alternative worship' emerged in the early 1990s, to mean forms of church interacting constructively with contemporary culture and not just using it for evangelism. The most influential example of how to do this was the Nine o'clock Service [NOS] 1988-95, which pioneered new forms of worship based on club culture with [it seemed then] enormous success. NOS functioned as a model for how to put together a genuinely contemporary form of church combining cutting-edge theology, new liturgy, media and music, and the stunning results were an inspiration and source of hope to many that the Church could be relevant to real life again. Alternative worship groups sprang up not just in the UK but also in New Zealand and Australia, some inspired by NOS and some quite separately as other groups of Christians reached similar conclusions about Church and culture.

When NOS collapsed in 1995 amid shocking revelations of sexual and psychological abuse, the entire movement seemed in peril; but it became clear that the internal problems of NOS were unique and not a characteristic of the wider movement. Nevertheless many groups had to weather a time of suspicion and sometimes outright hostility. But the movement continues to spread quietly since the underlying conditions of church and society that it addresses have intensified rather than faded.


Most alternative worship groups are attached to existing churches, or else form new churches within existing denominations. However there is often tension with the parent bodies since their experiments critique the accepted structures and behaviours of the Church.

Leadership

Alternative worship groups generally lack hierarchy or formal structure, the emphasis being that anybody can contribute at any level. Most services are put together by a regular team, but membership will be open to any who wish to get involved. Each part of the worship is seen as a gift from the person or persons creating it to God and to the rest of the worshippers, so there is a high level of openness to new contributions. This also requires a trust that people will play their part with care and appropriateness, a trust which seldom proves misplaced.


In worship the team will not be separated from the congregation in any way, or the congregation reduced to an audience. The space may be arranged so that there is no specific 'front', the focus of activity may move from one part of the church to another, or may be in many places at once. Direction proceeds by invitation, with no obligation to take part or to all do the same thing at the same time. The elements of the service are usually all built carefully around a theme, so teaching occurs through everything that happens, rather than being concentrated in a sermon given by a single authoritative voice. There is room for discussion and sharing, in small groups or with the whole congregation.

Many people in alternative worship are refugees from churches where they have been sat on by heavy leaderships for asking the wrong questions. Some indeed have been victims of religious abuse and have found out the hard way that authority figures don't always have divine credentials. The movement is very wary of people who claim authority or special inspira-




tion. NOS was unusual among alternative worship groups in having a large and elaborate leadership structure centred around one such person, and the abuse that this enabled only confirmed other groups in their aversion to such things. The movement tends to operate as overlapping and open-ended groups of friends.

Community



Alternative worship is deeply concerned for community. Community is a place of honesty, commitment and support, where people grow through relationship. It is essential to living any kind of authentic Christian life in societies which work against it in fine detail. In the contemporary urbanised world community is not necessarily about geographical proximity. It is about quality of relationships, and these can be sustained over large distances due to our technologies of transport and communication. But for many Christians community means shared living on the lines of Acts 4 32-35, in order to make visible the countercultural values of Kingdom living, and to support one another in practicing availability to those in need. The pressures and structures of modern life make this hard to achieve. In the UK, for the most part, the motivation for those joining the movement has generally been dissatisfaction with the culture of worship. Considerations of community have raised their heads only as the quest to reformulate worship leads inevitably to a need to reformulate the church that does the worshipping. In the United States the movement has arisen in the opposite way, as Christians forming incarnational communities to witness into subcultures then find that their worship needs to be rethought not only to be accessible to those they wish to reach, but also to the people they have now become.




Style

If alternative worship is about making church out of your everyday culture, the form that has developed in the UK reflects the dominance of the dance music culture for British under-40s. Clubs and raves demonstrated that a multimedia and multisensory environment can carry tremendous spiritual and emotional impact. Club culture also has an intense, if often superficial, sense of togetherness and an unfocussed but genuine concern for spirituality. The sense that clubs were a more openly spiritual environment than churches was an important trigger for many in alternative worship.

However, contrary to popular misconceptions, few alternative worship services involve frenetic music and dancing. The model taken from club culture is the 'chill-out' room - a space with a quiet, soothing ambience for resting in away from the deafening heat of the dancefloor. Chill-out rooms showed just what a church in the emerging culture might be like - a reflective, relaxing place to think or talk quietly, visually and sonically rich but gentle, a relief from noise and activity.


Art

Equally important as a point of reference is installation art. A large proportion of the new art of the 90s was of this kind, demonstrating the possibilities of designed or curated environments to convey meaning and affect how one sees the world. Most installation art has a narrative structure [explicit or implied], a 'story' or subject beyond formal abstraction or 'just-there-ness', and clearly such narratives can be relevant to spiritual growth or even worship. Some alternative worship events, such as labyrinths, are




on the borderline between church service and art installation, partaking equally of both.

Not only can installations form the environment of worship, they can be created as part of the worship by members of the congregation. This is a widespread and delightful practice which allows everyone to be creative and to join together in making something interesting - and often startlingly beautiful. This practice too has parallels in the contemporary art world. Many of those involved in alternative worship are artists, for whom it offers a far wider field for the exercise of their gifts than a conventional church service. Any format or medium can be incorporated. No prior rules will be imposed about doctrinal purity, or which styles are suitable for worship and which are unsuitable.



In contemporary conceptual art the real artwork is a state of mind, or thought, or insight rather than any artefacts that may be necessary to achieve it. There is an obvious parallel with the creation of an act of worship as a setting for encounter with God. The job of the 'worship artists' is to foreground a condition so that we can perceive God's presence and receive God's voice in it. They attempt by selection to clear a channel of 'noise', so that the ever-present divine signal may be more easily heard. On the one hand they are saying to God, "Here is a mode of communication that we can understand, if you choose to speak through it" - a mode of communication that offers other words for God's use than the usual forms of religious discourse. Equally, they are saying to other people, "We have already sensed God speaking in these things, and have tried to clear




some of the extraneous matter, the noise, so that his speech can be heard more easily."

Innovation and tradition

Clearly, the dark rich ambience of the chillout room and the communicative environments of installation art have parallels in ecclesiastical history. Observers are often bemused by the mixture of ultramodern and ancient in alternative worship services - medieval prayers over electronic music, video loops as settings for the mass. But oldness and newness as such are not the point.

Alternative worship is church that grows naturally out of the lives of its creators, without a priori rules about what forms this can and cannot take. This makes it possible to use the very latest forms of cultural expression in church. But they are not being used because they are the latest thing, but because they are where the participants live and find spiritual significance. For the same reason, most alternative worship services use a range of old forms of worship, because they are perceived as relevant and are a genuine help to the spirituality of those taking part.

To live in a culture is not to simply consume its most recent or fashionable products. It is to inhabit its mindset, which will embrace aspects of the past as well as the present. The aspects of the past that are found relevant will be particular to each culture. So cultural change involves not only change in contemporary fashions, but also in the areas of the past that are found relevant.




We have become aware that many older Christian traditions have much to say to current circumstances. In particular, the shift of our society towards an image-based culture, where the visual is the central means of communication, causes us to look again at how the Church communicated through imagery and ritual in the past. And our ecological anxiety causes us to look again at Celtic understandings of the wholeness of creation and humanity's place in it. Many more recent traditions, especially those which make encounter with God cerebral or rationalistic, have ceased to be relevant and give the impression that Christianity has nothing to offer the world anymore. In a time of great cultural change it becomes necessary to look at the whole of Christian tradition and discern what might be newly valid or ripe for reinterpretation, and what needs to be laid aside for a time.



Music

Alternative worship services generally use music as a continuous ambient not discontinuous songs. Songs there may well be, but these usually arise from and punctuate the musical and liturgical flow rather than forming a 'time of worship' as in a modern evangelical church. The music works as a TV or movie-style soundtrack behind everything, or like having music on for background. One thing flowing naturally from another is more important than musical genre, but the DJ soundtrack approach allows a much wider range of music [latin jazz/famous pop anthem/film theme/symphony] than even the most versatile worship band can supply. The music can comment on what's going on, or change its mood.




A very large part of the music used is secular stuff brought in from home - because people have perceived spiritual content in it, or just because it works with whatever's going on. The result is that worship has the same soundtrack as the rest of people's lives, but the church context changes the perceived meaning. This can be revelatory, and can stunningly transform the way that the same music is heard in its usual secular context. Some would say that the use of secular music in church profanes church, but the experience of alternative worship is that the current flows the other way!

This musical approach does away with the dominance of the worship band. The underlying model is no longer the rock concert, where the congregation becomes an audience, and the band struggle to deflect the focus from themselves to God! Nor is worship experienced largely as the singing of songs. The music becomes servant to prayer, liturgy, silence and activity.


Ritual

Most alternative worship services incorporate some sort of ritual or symbolic act. Ritual got a bad name as something incomprehensible done by a man at the front, but alternative worship rituals, which can be anything between solemn and crazy, usually involve the whole congregation in something that sums up, consummates an aspect of the service. It takes the congregation from thinking to doing, talking to being, gives a space for response in more than words.




Many alternative worship groups are experimenting with Holy Communion, creating new liturgies and settings that explore different aspects of its meaning and theology. In particular, for many groups it has gained new significance through being taken back to its original setting in a meal with friends. To rewrite the rite is to make it one's own, taking one's place in the story, passing it on as a live tradition. Those who experiment have found that it becomes a vital and central part of their worship.

Tools for encounter



Alternative worship tries to give people 'tools' for honest encounters with God. 'Tools' might mean prayer, pens and paper, a video loop, something to eat, someone to talk to, Holy Communion, or anything else that can help us to meet God in some way. Alternative worship invents new tools and reinvents old ones, but they all have one important characteristic - they don't lead to predetermined outcomes. That is to say, we seek to bring God and the participant together - but not to manipulate the encounter to get specific 'results'. This is essential to protect its genuineness.



But 'open-ended tools' will seem dangerous to many - how can we be sure it's 'safe'? What if people get the wrong ideas? Well, there has been editorial control, if you like, in the designing of the 'tools' - they are designed by Christians, used in the context of a Christian act of worship, to make an encounter with the Christian God. But what the parties do with the encounter is up to them. We trust God to make use of what we offer, and we trust people with the tools rather than treating them as children who must be closely watched or controlled.


The implication of all this is that the team who organise the event see

themselves as facilitators rather than leaders. Their skills are put to helping everyone present, themselves included, have an authentic encounter with God. They don't presume to dictate the content of that encounter or where it should lead. They trust that God will deal with people with infinite sensitivity for their situations. The absence of pressure, or concern for specific 'results', encourages openness to God. Amazing encounters may follow.


Evangelism

To many people in our culture evangelism is not a good thing and is not welcome. This cultural mood is not aimed solely at the Church, but at any organisation seeking new members through personal persuasion rather than passive advertising. We fear that we may not be able to back out or change our minds. However, in our secular society an un-asked for approach is the only contact many people have with Christianity. It may be seen as an attempt to gain power over the lives of others, rather than as an expression of love and concern for their eternal wellbeing. Many people think that they will be 'got at' if they set foot inside a church, and are highly resistant to what they see as sales pitches from an institution masquerading in trendy clothes. In an age sensitive to the abuses of power, the Church finds itself under suspicion.


Alternative worship is not a form of evangelism as such. It is not about dressing the Church up in contemporary clothes to appeal to outsiders. It is not about putting on a spectacle in order to get a message across. It is an attempt by the people involved to make worship for themselves, in



forms that allow them to bring their whole selves and lives before God. But this makes what goes on more accessible to outsiders - because it's recognisably part of the world they live in, touches the issues they care about, isn't just a religious experience that you have to be an insider to get. Sometimes they start to see where God is in their own lives - and that's often not where religious convention would have us expect.



Many churches now use contemporary music and media, and yet the emphasis remains on the leaders and the message. Alternative worship, whatever its forms of technology or culture, puts the power in the hands of the participants to construct their own encounter with God using the materials provided. There are no strings attached and no predetermined outcome. Visitors are not targeted but encouraged to take part in the worship at whatever level they feel comfortable - or just sit back and watch. Much of what goes on is accessible to people at many levels and degrees of involvement, and the absence of 'threat' allows people to open up to God without having their freedom or dignity infringed.



For churches interested in evangelism, there is a danger that worship becomes manipulative, done a particular way to engineer the desired outcome. Many churches are tempted to pick up the latest fashionable 'tool', use it for a while, and if it doesn't 'work' - 'work' often being defined as producing conversions of a particular kind in a particular timescale - it is discarded as a 'failure'. Not only does this damage the integrity of the tools, it leaves a legacy of suspicion about the real motives behind their use, wherever they are used. And it also denies the people who have

'used' and discarded the tools any longer-term or more subtle blessings that might have accrued from their use.

And it misses the point, because if the tool is good it connects people to God. What the two of them do about it then is up to them. Evangelism as usually practised works from a 'closed set' model, and seeks proof that one has crossed the boundary. Alternative worship, working from an 'open set' model, seeks change of direction, which is less susceptible to immediate proof and, like turning the proverbial oil tanker, may not be visible until long after the rudder has been swung.

Working for the Kingdom

At its root the movement badly called 'alternative worship' is not about new forms of worship or organisation - these things are secondary expressions of the core belief. The heart of alternative worship is a changed view of the relationship between believers and the world. The world, and not just the organised Church, is seen as the site of God's activity, and the attention of believers is turned outward into it to discern, and then follow wherever God is seen. The Kingdom is not identified with the visible organised Church, and the emphasis is on discovery of the Kingdom wherever it may be found, and then served, rather than believing that we have to assimilate things into organised Christianity before they can be classified as Kingdom. It is about incarnation, about being the concrete embodiment of what it means to be children of God, in any and every situation. Any specific forms of worship or organisation only exist to resource that process, and need to be held loosely as forms that should never be taken as final templates for our activities or God's Kingdom.