

The Labyrinth

at Mercy Center

The labyrinth at Mercy Center has changed radically recently. The surroundings of the path designed as a calming spiritual tool are undergoing renewal. A sense of enclosure was lost when undergrowth was removed from the grounds in a campus maintenance program this spring. But Mercy's golden spiral and its setting have a history of change.



Father Tom Hand, SJ, founder of the East-West Center, built the labyrinth in 1997 as a place for walking meditation with the help of volunteers Jack Mulqueeny and Peter O'Shea. Here Peter (left) and Fr. Hand begin the work, all done by hand.

Jack (left) and Peter worked with Fr. Hand (or Hando, as the meditators called him) three or four months to carve the labyrinth out of a spot protected by oaks and pines, shielded from the roads on either side.

They leveled the hill carefully under Hando's watchful eye, laying a surface of Gold Fines and edging the path with 1330 feet of bricks—a tedious job. Hando chose the jagged central stone of serpentine as a reminder of the stone Jacob erected at the site of his dream of Heaven.



Walkers, including Father Hand (left foreground) and Sister Clarita Doyle (right), rejoiced in the labyrinth's calm beauty. (1999)

Volunteers from the East-West meditation community, led by master gardener and devoted meditator Alice Swiney, created a garden bordering the labyrinth with bushes, seasonal flowers, a patch of lawn and a goldfish pond. The labyrinth was so protected that many visitors to campus had no idea it existed. People and creatures began frequent visits. Raccoons were such



diligent fishermen that the small pond had to be filled in.

By 2005, the garden around the labyrinth was luxuriant and trees draped around the edges protectively. Three years ago, a large oak on the south side of the labyrinth was suddenly felled by disease. "I was the first to see it, said Mary Fuchs, long-time meditator and garden volunteer who came upon the sight on a Saturday. "It fell on the shed and everywhere. Hoses and pots were strewn all

over the place because of the way the limb fell. It was a shock."

St. Francis had been sheltered from the sun by the oak. Now the small statue is inside the remaining stump (right) and framed by Japanese maples. A pine tree fell from pine borer disease. The recent pruning which exposed the vista of the campus was a radical change and startling to regular walkers, including Peter who still walks it every week.



In the unexpected, Alice saw opportunity for renewal. Alice felt called again to plan and plant, using her years of study and experience to soften the openness. "I have a gift," she acknowledges. "I can create harmony out of chaos." She is thoughtfully attentive to every scent, color, and texture that is planted, mindful of Father Hand's wishes and the sisters' ideas. She planted lace hydrangeas because for Hando they were linked to his mother, a memory from childhood.



She chose purples, mauves and pinks to calm the nerves of visitors. She has planted double-petalled cherry trees in threes along the north side because "Hando loved them." They will become like large umbrellas shielding the view from the campus road.

Left: Alice Swiney at work among the hydrangeas.



New white roses bloom along the low wall (left) with mock orange bushes in front of them. On the northeast border Alice has planted camellias and arborvitae which will again become an evergreen screen. (below)

"I pay attention to different textures, varying heights," Alice said. "The eyes should go up and down and not block the energy in a garden. Many hands have gone into this garden. Hando used to say 'Where attention goes, energy flows.

Abundant energy is flowing in the garden and around the labyrinth that he built.



Labyrinth summer 2013 by Mark Werlin