

Labyrinth returns to St. Alban's courtyard as a challenging respite

By Jeremy Cox

One of Salisbury's hidden gems has returned.

In March, the local contractor R&R Coatings put the finishing touches on the repainting of the labyrinth outside St. Alban's Episcopal Church. The feature is once again open to anyone – the public included – who seeks a spiritual journey that involves moving their feet.

What's a labyrinth and what does it have to do with spirituality?

They may not be as visible as steeples, but labyrinths have become an indelible feature at many places of worship. The Worldwide Labyrinth Locator database has recorded more than 5,900 labyrinths in more than 85 countries.

A labyrinth is like a maze, with some key differences. Both lead people on a journey containing many twists and turns. But unlike a maze, a labyrinth doesn't include dead ends. Nor does it seek to deceive the sojourner.

Instead, it is a single path leading toward an end point at the center. In this way, it is a symbol for the search for meaning that many people experience in their lives, said The Rev. Deacon Alisha King, a longtime St. Alban's member before joining the ministry.

"A labyrinth is a symbol of life, an ongoing deeper meaning, an ongoing sacred journey leading us inward, outward and to a greater wholeness," King said during a March 27 sermon.

For some people, it can be difficult to pray while staying still. That's where a labyrinth can help, she said.

"I go wherever God takes me," King said. "I can settle into knowing that God is with me. This walk is a metaphor for life."

The labyrinth has taken several forms during its quarter-century history at St. Alban's. It began as a 36-foot diameter canvas with a pencil-drawn design in 1996. Parishioners from several churches were invited to paint the lines of the design. Many wrote prayers onto the canvas before it was painted over, literally imbuing it with spiritual meaning.

In 2009, St. Alban's gave the labyrinth a permanent home, painted onto a circular concrete pad on the southeast corner of its St. Alban's Drive property. It demonstrated power to connect with people of all faiths, drawing community groups, Salisbury University classes and others to its contemplative confines.

But by the end of the past decade, all that use was beginning to take its toll. The labyrinth's green paint was fading and cracking. So, the St. Alban's Vestry – the Episcopal version of a church council – invested in a complete refurbishment.

That was 2020 – not a great time to be undertaking any project, big or small. The COVID-19 pandemic led to delays. So did the weather. The Eastern Shore isn't known for providing the consecutive days of dry weather needed for paint to be applied and to dry.

But persistence paid off, and now the labyrinth is back in all its beige and green glory.