

Appendix A

community labyrinth

royal park, parkville.

letters of support

Submitted by

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**Letter of support for the Community Labyrinth - Royal Park
Cloud Mountain Retreat, Dunkeld. Victoria 3294
Rev. Paul Sanders**

I have written this letter of support based on my own observations and participation in the construction of a labyrinth for the Dunkeld community. It comes simply as an expression of what can be done and how we proceeded to make it possible.

The Dunkeld Arboretum Development Group gave support for the building of a classic labyrinth in the Dunkeld Arboretum. This followed a request and submission/presentation by me to the committee.

While I may have found support for building a labyrinth on private land adjacent to the park, I took the view that a public labyrinth in the park would best express inclusivity. My approach was to locate other interested people who formed a working committee to process the components of construction with communication of the concept. There were some 6-8 community members of Dunkeld who helped steer the project. It became apparent after some planning that there were layers of jurisdiction over the land, in particular the local Lands Council and DSE. The plans and building strategy covering safety of workers and protection of plants were given approval by the state minister following DSE recommendation. This was over a period of six months of formal documentation.

Why the Labyrinth in the Arboretum?

Labyrinths seem to have a natural connection with the concept of pilgrimage. The act of walking itself can be very settling and centering. There is something reassuring and distilling in the act of reflection through movement. Therefore, while walking the labyrinth is not an extensive distance, it positions the walker into the larger containment which the natural environment offers

- a. The natural world is full of imitations of change and stability. There is a synergy between the circular movement of walking and the rhythms and seasons of our own life and the natural world.
- b. Parks are public places and labyrinths offer the symbolic gesture of inclusion when placed inside areas which are identified as public.
- c. There is a freedom associated with land which reminds us of the indigenous values of stewardship of place. The walker is not just receiving, but is able to unite symbolically in a co-creative act of acknowledgement of place as important to the wider community.
- d. The public park breaks down any idea of ownership. The labyrinth can be walked without the impediment of doing it right or of needing to follow a set rubic. Therefore, the park offers a unifying experience transcending the particular spiritual, cultural or social tradition one may be closely identified with. The park/land is really seamless (without real boundaries) and so inclusion is able to be expressed through the labyrinth as a universal object of contemplation.



The process of having approval of the labyrinth in the Dunkeld Arboretum did involve making appropriate connections with the Indigenous Community. This was difficult because the land in question was not easily identifiable with one grouping. We consulted the CEO of the western group and had on our committee a local indigenous person. The DSE instructed us to make all attempts to inform and include comment. Indigenous people in the area were informed and participated in the opening ceremony. Professor Marcia Langdon has a home in Dunkeld and gave a great deal of private encouragement as did others. The comments at the opening were how closely the circular form of the labyrinth reflected their own approaches. We also included an indigenous healing circle as an outer rim of the labyrinth. (see photo).

The question arose often, did we need the whole of community to approve or own the labyrinth? This is a hard question and was answered by gauging the levels of opposition and uncertainty about the function and meaning of the labyrinth. We held two community information evenings which assisted in telling the story. We placed an explanation also into the local community newsletter. Our experience, the local community leaders were on side and there were no dissenting voices. Church leaders and community leaders were supportive.

One of the important matters we had to face in construction was the issuer of safety and access. We took the decision to ensure the labyrinth could be walked by people who had a physical disability and who would require wide enough paths on a flat surface. This meant the building material needed to be stone and therefore became more costly. However, it seemed vital and consistent with the labyrinth's spiritual and psychological significance that everyone should have access and be able to participate.

The other question we faced was minimising maintenance. The committee made the recommendation that we build from stone (pavers) on a firm base to minimise weed infestation. The question posed by DSE was: Who would continue to take an interest in caring for the labyrinth? We gave this undertaking, knowing the maintenance would not be a difficult task into the future.

Finally, a funding gift for the labyrinth came from a farmer who had lost his daughter in a car accident. He wanted others who visited the park to have the opportunity to find peace and solace from walking, remembering and reflecting on the gift of life. My own personal gratitude is founded upon the act of trusting the innate symbolism of the labyrinth, for when personal gratitude is founded upon an act of trusting the innate symbolism of the labyrinth, for when we took the decision people came forth with support. My sense is the labyrinth, has archetypal significance and deeply resonates with people longs for personal integration. My own view it speaks because of its sculptural, aesthetic and sensuous invitation to draw us into mindful consideration.

I would believe (as has been our experience) the labyrinth will sit naturally and beautifully in the landscape of Royal Park, and remind those who find it, to just stop, feel and consider the moment they are in as not inconsequential and not without promise.

Rev. Paul Saunders
Contemplative and Zen Teacher.

Rev. Dr. Helen Malcolm
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14th April 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am writing in support of the proposal to install a labyrinth in Royal Park on the site of the old Royal Children's Hospital.

As a GP, Anglican priest and Senior Lecturer in Rural General Practice at the University of Melbourne's Rural Clinical School, I have presented workshops on the labyrinth to patients, University and health staff, hospice staff, women's groups, church groups and the general public. Its usefulness as a walking meditation for stress relief and to provide time out for self-care means that it has benefits across a wide range of community groups and individuals. Our new labyrinth at the University of Melbourne's Rural Health Academic Centre in Shepparton is used by staff, medical students, patients and the community, either individually or in group activities.

Although scientific research into the effects of walking the labyrinth is in its infancy, there are some published controlled trials showing benefit for nurses entering the work place, normalization of blood pressure in patients, as well as increased hope and decreased stress levels. There is currently a research project running in the USA on the use of the labyrinth for children with autism, with promising early results.

Robert Ferre, Director of Labyrinth Enterprises and a world-renowned constructor of labyrinths (retained for the new labyrinth at the Children's Hospital in Westmead) says 'The day will soon be upon us in which no progressive architect will design a healthcare facility without including a meditation labyrinth. The day is not far off when patients, staff members, and doctors will insist that their existing facility install a labyrinth.'

<http://www.labyrinth-enterprises.com/labentnew/healing.html> (accessed 14th April 2012)

I wholeheartedly endorse the proposal for this labyrinth to be constructed in Royal Park and commend the concept plan with its meditative features of contemplation spaces, water, native vegetation and its important links to and acknowledgement of indigenous culture.

Yours sincerely



Helen Malcolm (Rev. Dr.)



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16 April 2012

To whom it may Concern

Re: Proposal for a Labyrinth at the Royal Childrens Hospital

I work with a community mental health service, located in Healesville Victoria. In 2011, our local service completed a major project – the installation of a labyrinth in community parkland within the township of Healesville. The objectives of this project were multi-fold, and included:

- Project development that would engage and build connections with all members of the community in planning, artistic development and fund raising, and importantly also involve people with mental health problems who are traditionally disengaged from community activity
- To develop a community and recreational space, free and accessible to all community members and people of all abilities
- As a mental health promotion project, providing a space for meditation and reflection in a busy and stressful world
- As a 'sacred space' and a place of meaning, for people of all faiths or no particular faith, which can have spiritual meaning for celebration, ritual or remembrance.
- As a place of beauty; as a site for artwork; as a tourist attraction; as a site for festivals, events and performances

Since the Healesville Labyrinth was opened in March 2011, we are glad to say that all the above objectives have been met. What began as a modest project in a local park gathered amazing support amongst community members and organisations and we now have a beautiful labyrinth which is used daily by individuals who walk it to meet their own needs for prayer, contemplation or as a daily meditation tool. The labyrinth has also been used to celebrate different events in the calendar such as Mothers Day, walks of gratitude for local harvest festivals, walks for the annual Earth Hour lit by candles, to mark the longest and shortest days, for a remembrance ceremony for the 2009 bushfires and a wedding. There have been choirs singing on the labyrinth and at a recent festival, was used for multi cultural and circle dancing. The labyrinth is also used by local health professionals to assist groups and individuals learn the techniques of mindfulness in addressing symptoms of depression and anxiety.



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One of the delightful, but unexpected outcomes of the labyrinth has been the great attraction it has for children. The labyrinth is located next to a playground and children love to run and follow the path to centre. Most children who use the playground will also spend some time on the labyrinth, though it is by no means a traditional playground feature. Labyrinths are often built in schools and there are many instructive books outlining the ways that labyrinths can be adapted for therapeutic use for children, through artwork, games and discussion.

Labyrinths have a rich and amazing history and have recently been adapted for modern use, addressing a different set of needs in a modern society. In a labyrinth there is intrinsic simplicity, beauty and versatility that offers whatever meaning an individual wishes to ascribe to it. In a modern secular society, traditional church buildings no longer provide the sacred places that are still needed and a labyrinth can serve this and many other uses. As a landscaping feature alone, the value is inestimable. We thoroughly support this proposal and would be happy to be contacted if we can offer further information or assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Merran Macs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M'.

Merran Macs
Programs Manager

In support of a labyrinth at the site of the old RCH in Royal Park

I worked at the Royal Children's Hospital between 1982 and 2008, first as a junior resident and latterly as senior consultant paediatrician in pain management. I can only imagine what it would have been like if there had been a labyrinth to walk close by.

My first labyrinth walk was in Vancouver in 2002, on an RCH travelling scholarship, but it was impossible to locate one in Melbourne on my return. Now the numbers are increasing but there are only a few in public places and only one at a Children's hospital in Australia.

I would have walked a labyrinth every day to benefit my own health and wellbeing, taking the time to journey into my being to a place of rest and regeneration, as I walked the path to the centre, then returning refreshed to my work, or home at the end of the day. I would have recommended it to the families I worked with, to help with tension, anxiety and grief, and also for contemplation, celebration and gratitude. It is different from and complementary to a walk in the park, or sitting in the chapel.

Walking a labyrinth can provide a sense of focus and calm, and there are times when its sacred geometry could have helped me before important meetings with staff and patients, or the parents and children before a big procedure.

Having the community facility of a labyrinth would have broken down the sense of us and them. Much as communal eating areas, and now the meerkats at the new hospital, a labyrinth is for everyone, and would have fostered that we are all one, we are all in this together, this is a caring community, where we have time to care for ourselves and each other.

Unlike many facilities, a labyrinth once built does not require ongoing staff and has minimal maintenance costs, depending on structure. In other words it is cost effective, and everyone would have breathed a sigh of relief that there was at least one service at the hospital that did not cost money to run, to use and to maintain! At the same time, it would have been a great focal point for activities including group walks to music, by anyone and everyone in the hospital community and beyond.

I hope my imagined past is the reality of the near future and the Royal Children's Hospital embraces the modern revival of this ancient spiritual tool.

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