

Rita R. Hughes Memorial Prayer Garden

St. Stephen, Martyr Roman Catholic Church, Chesapeake, VA



LOCATION: The Garden is located in a quiet space beside the rectory, and across from the cemetery.

HISTORY: The Prayer Garden is a loving gift to the parish of St. Stephen, Martyr, from Catherine M. Wright and Cynthia B. Piccirilli, in memory of their dear friend Rita R. Hughes. The Garden was completed in early 2016, and dedicated on May 30, 2016, with Fr. Brian Rafferty presiding. The dedication stone has a photo of Rita, with an inscription of her favorite scripture verse (Jer. 29:11). The central feature of the garden is a labyrinth, designed after the labyrinth at the Chartres Cathedral in France, purchased from The Labyrinth Company of Connecticut, and installed by Snow Jr. and King, Inc. of Norfolk, VA. A red paved Memorial Walkway surrounds the labyrinth, and contains the names of parishioners' loved ones, both deceased and living. The labyrinth is an invitation to walk and pray. The benches are an invitation to sit and pray.

WHAT IS A LABYRINTH: The labyrinth dates back thousands of years, found in all religious traditions in various forms, to be walked in prayer and meditation. It is a path, with one entrance and a single route that winds in a circular pattern to the center. The same path takes you out of the labyrinth. It is not a maze, as there are no wrong turns. The labyrinth became part of the Christian tradition as a way to fulfill the pledge of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, when actual travel became too difficult.

HOW DO I WALK THE LABYRINTH: There is no right or wrong way to pray using the labyrinth. Start by quieting yourself and opening your mind and heart to listen. You might like to read/reflect on a line from Scripture, hold a memory or photo of someone you wish to pray for, consider a life experience for which you are seeking healing, think about the things in your life for which you are grateful, ... and place yourself in the presence of God. Then, enter the labyrinth and walk the path purposefully to the center, at a pace comfortable for you. If others are walking the labyrinth, allow them to pass around you. Pause and reflect while in the center. When ready, return along the same path, until you exit the labyrinth, always mindful of God's presence. You may want to take time after your exit, to sit and reflect on your experience, using a journal or drawing. Come to the Garden often!

MEMORIAL WALKWAY: The walkway surrounds the labyrinth. Indented pavers hold engraved brass plates, to either remember deceased or honor living loved ones. Since many of our parish family are not native to the region, the walkway has become a powerful and prayerful way to bring our loved ones to our new home. Paver plates can be ordered online: [Memorial Paver Order](#).