

LNN's Prison Labyrinth Program

Notes on our First Meeting

By Paula Hills Starr



Coffee Creek Correctional Facility
January 10, 2011

Seven volunteers (Pat Rankin, Lisa Lucas, Kay Kinneavy, Christiana Brinton, Laura Spurrell, Lisa Horner and Paula Starr) met with Coffee Creek Chaplain Emily Brault and nine inside participants to walk the labyrinth together at 6pm and explore the ways in which volunteers could help support the much loved labyrinth program that had been curtailed when the most recent volunteer labyrinth facilitator had passed away this past September 2010.

We met in the receiving room just inside the razor wired outer fences and proceeded, after checking all our personal belongings into lockers, through the metal detector, manual pat downs, 7 or 8 more locked doors, another identity check against the roster at an inner checkpoint, finally arriving at the chapel.

Resident clerks had set up the 7 circuit painted canvas labyrinth and one box containing the labyrinth paraphernalia was left for us to unpack and look through while we waited for our inside sisters to arrive. While we waited Chaplain Brault filled us in on the usual way that the labyrinth walks have been held.



1. Inmates arrive and are seated for an opening check in
2. Names and ancestry is shared on the mother's side. I am....daughter of... daughter of.....
3. An inspirational reading is offered by the facilitator

4. Participants are invited to choose one or more card from a few thinning decks of focusing cards like Hearthstones, Angel Cards etc.
5. The labyrinth is walked
6. The walkers regroup and share their thoughts or experiences
7. Inmates return to their units



When the women arrived we followed that format, adding some quiet recorded music to the walk, and sharing briefly what we experienced as walkers or what had brought each of us to this point in our labyrinth walking journey.

Women expressed a desire to have the candle that had been gifted them by the previous facilitator, lit, but alas no matches, and none likely to be allowed in future we

learned from Emily after the walk. Plans were made to bring in a faux candle for them.

Following the walk the volunteers squeezed into Emily's office, on floor and chair to continue our meeting as the chapel was used continuously by other religious services after our allotted hour. We learned about the process that we'd be required to go through in order to receive our permanent volunteer badges so that we could come and go without needing to be escorted by Emily.



1. A 4 hr. class offered once a month in Salem or Coffee Creek, **Next class Feb. 3rd** in Salem. Emily will submit each volunteer's name so that we receive mailed invitations to that meeting.
2. A second 2 hr. class at Coffee Creek that would cover information specific to that institution and include photographing and finger printing of volunteers
3. Some online filling out of forms and then a 4 – 6 week wait for badges. In the interim Emily will continue to escort us so that the program can continue to offer its quiet, centering space.

We discussed privacy protocols, the importance of not sharing personal information, including addresses, specifics about our families etc. Any correspondences that we might engage in with inmates need to be via a PO Box or institutional address like a church and content needs to stick strictly to labyrinth topics.

A few behavior management techniques were shared in the context of the realities of prison culture. We learned that most of the participants that evening had been lifers or living out other long-term sentences. Several of the women have participated in the labyrinth program since its inception in 2005, or for several years.

Anything facilitators might want to bring in to the facility, except printed articles or papers, will need to be explained to Emily some time in advance of the facilitator's arrival (1 week?) so that she can obtain clearance for that item. This includes CDs, photos, books,

inspirational card sets or anything else you might want to bring. Parameters are narrow so think carefully before asking for permission.

We scheduled our next visit on Jan. 24th, in which Paula Starr and Pat Rankin will share facilitator duties. Kay Kinneavy agreed to set up an online scheduling tool so that we can cover all the possible times that Chaplain Brault can plan to be there on Monday nights for the next 3 months. Those dates were: Jan. 24th, Feb. 7th, 14th, 28th, and March 14th, 28th. Paula Starr agreed to handle the scheduling of volunteers and act as liaison with Emily who already oversees 300 volunteers. Our plan is to staff the scheduled labyrinth walks in pairs.



Emily offered to give us a brief tour of the facility and we poked our noses into 4 different units, getting a lay of the land tour including classroom space, common rooms, cells, exercise areas, the cosmetology training salon and the K-9 Companions Training section, where we spoke to an inmate who shared her very well behaved yellow lab puppy with us as she described what the program entailed.

We retraced our steps back through all the security levels and parted in the receiving room. I'm sure the effects of this visit will live on and percolate through each of our lives in different ways over the months to come. It was sobering and wonderful in equal measure. The labyrinth is an awesome container whose power and presence was felt yet again by all who participated.

