

## **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:**

- A) Labyrinths seem to have a natural connection with the concept of pilgrimage. The act of walking itself can be very settling and centring. 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.**
- B) The natural world is full of intimations 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.**
- C) Parks are public places and labyrinths offer the symbolic gesture of inclusion when placed inside areas which are identified as public.**
- D) 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.**
- E) 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 rubric. 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 the approval of the labyrinth in the Dunkeld Arboretum did involve making the appropriate connections with the indigenous community. This was difficult because the land in question was not easily identifiable with one grouping. We consulted with 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 the own approaches. We also included an indigenous healing circle as an outer rim of the labyrinth. (see photo)

The question rose often, did we need the whole 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 news letter. 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 issue 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 of 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 we took the decision people came forth with support. My sense is the labyrinth has archetypal significance and deeply resonates

with people longings 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 the Royal Park, and remind those who find it, too just stop, feel and consider the moment they are in as not inconsequential and not without promise.

Rev. Paul Sanders

Contemplative and Zen teacher.