



# Nebraska Zen Center



## ANNUAL REPORT 2025

## Dear Sangha,

As this year draws to a close, we can see how much has shifted and deepened for us as a community and organization. It feels like a year marked by steady unfolding—of practice, of relationships, and of our shared vision for NZC—held within a spirit of *not knowing*, of staying open to what the dharma is asking of us now and next.

Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year was a powerful expression of this shared aspiration. In our July celebrations, we were especially honored to welcome Rev. Teijo Munnich and Rev. Ted O’Toole, both in the lineage of our founding teacher, Dainin Katagiri Roshi, whose presence reconnected us with the roots of our tradition in the Midwest.

Throughout 2025, our teaching and practice life remained rich and steady. Interim priest Rev. Daishin McCabe supported a reliable monthly rhythm. Our Resident Priest-in-Training program continued to mature, with residents Brian Shinkyu Cote, Evan Jikan Britzius, and Carol Kanshin Dougherty enhancing our offerings and giving the sangha regular opportunities to practice closely with ordained priests. We also saw the emergence of student-led dharma talks at Sunday Open Zen, a hopeful sign of shared responsibility and the blossoming of dharma voices within the sangha.

Practice at NZC continues to extend beyond the zendo cushions. We sustained numerous practice opportunities and robust work practice. Precepts training culminated in a jukai ceremony at Omaha Corrections Center, reminding us that vows to live wisely and compassionately are one way we leave the world a bit kinder than we found it.

Our membership and outreach reflected a quiet but real vitality. Member numbers held

steady with a slight increase, Sunday Open Zen remained well attended with many new faces, and participation in retreats and special events was strong. We continued prison outreach, hosted school and university classes, and deepened connections with communities such as Zen Fields and Kansas Zen Center, as well as welcoming teachers from Tri-Faith Initiative and Gaden Shartse Monastery.

Financially, 2025 was both encouraging and clarifying. Our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary fundraiser, along with memberships and donations, helped sustain the Center, even as we continue to strain to meet expenses in a challenging nonprofit environment. A grant from the Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism recognized the value of our priest-in-training residency program and will help offset its costs.

At the center of all of this is “not knowing.” We do not know what the coming year will bring, but we do know that we can keep showing up together with honesty, humility, and kindness. Zen master Suzuki Roshi once said, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the expert’s mind there are few.” A beginner’s mind is steeped in not knowing, and this clear, receptive mind does not assume it already understands. May we continue to cultivate this mind together in the year ahead, trusting that when we meet each moment with openness and care, the path will reveal itself step by step and our shared life at NZC will be of genuine benefit to all beings.

Karalee Picard, NZC Board President

## 2025 Snapshot

### *2025: Our Fiftieth Anniversary Year!*



2025 marked the passage of fifty years since Dainin Katagiri Roshi founded the Nebraska Zen Center in 1975. To mark this auspicious milestone, NZC hosted a weekend extravaganza, dubbed **50 Hours of Celebration and Sitting**, from Friday July 18 to Sunday, July 20. For the occasion, we were joined by Rev. Teijo Munnich, a student of Katagiri Roshi's and dharma sister of our long-time abbot, Rev. Nonin Chowaney; and Rev. Ted O'Toole, Guiding Teacher of Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, also in the Katagiri lineage. Ted also happens to be the teacher of our summer resident priest-in-training Evan Jikan Britzius.



The celebration included periods of meditation through the weekend, interspersed with activities and rituals, including an extended Full Moon ceremony on Friday evening, and on Saturday, a family outing and neighborhood history walk, dharma talks and shared stories by guests and sangha members, community meals, a calligraphy demonstration, a tea ceremony, and Zen poetry readings.



Sunday began with a special anniversary memorial service, a circumambulation of the temple and a lively public dokusan with our guest teachers, followed by a big, NZC-style potluck, complete with live music and much community engagement.



We are so grateful that Nebraska Zen Center remains strong after all these years, and to all the friends who came from near and far to help celebrate its landmark anniversary. How wonderful to sit in silence together, share meals and stories of our founding teachers, and enjoy each other's presence.

## Teaching

### Interim Priest Daishin McCabe:

Rev. Daishin McCabe's continuing service to Nebraska Zen Center (NZC) as Interim Priest allowed us to settle into a stable monthly schedule in 2025, alternating between 3-day sesshins and weekends of activities including Full Moon ceremony, Intro to Zen, and zazenkai, among other special offerings. In 2025, we began to schedule opportunities for family practice into a set bi-monthly rotation, a practice we expect to continue according to the needs of the sangha. As in the past, Daishin led Sunday Open Zen and shared dharma talks during his monthly in-person visits, and continued to provide dharma talks via Zoom one Sunday each month. In addition, Daishin has worked with a number of students on precepts training and rakusu sewing.

In view of his many responsibilities and growing family, Daishin has notified the NZC Board of his desire to reduce his in-person visits in 2026. He reached out on NZC's behalf to Rev. Koji Acquaviva of Clouds and Water Zen Center in Minneapolis, to see if he would be willing to fill in for Daishin in the off-months. As a result, the Board has arranged for Koji to alternate with Daishin in 2026 to provide monthly in-person visits as well as monthly Zoom dharma talks.

The Board and sangha are deeply grateful for Daishin's past and continuing support and guidance for NZC projects and governance, and to both Daishin and Koji for their generosity in bringing the dharma to our community in the coming year.



*Daishin makes offerings during Rohatsu 2025*



*Koji leads a study class in January 2026*

### Resident priest-in-training program:

NZC's resident priest-in-training program continued to mature in 2025 and bring mutual benefit to the NZC sangha and the residents we welcomed. The program provides a unique opportunity for priests-in-training to dive into the role of resident priest in a regional Zen center, while allowing the sangha to enjoy practicing and interacting with an ordained priest on a regular basis. Our second 2024 resident, Brian Shinkyu Cote, stayed over to the end of January 2025 before he moved on to further study and practice on the west coast. Our next resident, Evan

Jikan Britzius, was recommended to us by his teacher Ted O'Toole from Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. Jikan arrived at the beginning of May and stayed through the end of October. In December, we were joined by Carol Kanshin Dougherty, who was ordained by Rev. Teah Strozer at San Francisco Zen Center and earned her Masters of Divinity at Naropa University. Carol plans to stay as resident until May 2026, when we will be rejoined by Shinkyu, who will reside with us for his shuso training. We look forward to the privilege of hosting his shuso ceremony next summer.

The presence of residents makes a vast difference to the Center, as each of them make substantial contributions to our outreach, our practice, our operations and our growth. They participate fully in providing ongoing dharma talks and leading retreats and zazen. We trust that this program provides our residents a valuable opportunity for growth, greater experience and confidence as they move forward in their spiritual careers.

Rev. McCabe has been integral in the program, providing steady and consistence guidance to our residents. We look forward to continuing interest in the program and an ongoing stream of residential candidates.

In 2025, NZC received a grant from the Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism to support the residency program. We are pleased and grateful that they found the program worthy of funding that helps to defray its cost to NZC. For more information about the Foundation, see <https://fredericklenzfoundation.org>.



*Resident Priests Brian Shinkyu Cote, Evan Jikan Britzius, and Carol Kanshin Dougherty.*

### Visiting Teachers

We were delighted that two eminent Soto Zen priests joined us in July to help celebrate Nebraska Zen Center's Fiftieth Anniversary: Rev. Teijo Munnich, abbess of Great Tree Zen Women's Temple in North Carolina, and Rev. Ted O'Toole, Guiding Teacher of Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. In September, we welcomed Myobun Esther Tishman to the zendo to share a talk on the meaning of faith in America. Myobun is a dharma heir and teacher at Buddha Eye Community Temple in Eugene, Oregon, an interfaith chaplain, and founder of Liberty Walks.

Myobun arrived in Omaha during her months-long pilgrimage across the country, an effort to engage in conversation with communities across the nation and bridge differences. After her talk, members of the sangha joined her for a walk on Memorial Park Trail.



*Ted O'Toole, Myobun Tishman, Teijo Munnich*

In May, we were visited by two teachers from Tri-Faith Community, a unique three-faith community in Omaha (the only one of its kind in the world). They offered a valuable “5B” workshop on inter-religious understanding.

We look forward to many visits from Rev. Koji Acquaviva in the coming year, as he alternates with Rev. Daishin McCabe in providing spiritual guidance to the NZC sangha.

#### Student Talks:

In 2025, Daishin encouraged several senior students to begin providing dharma talks for Sunday Open Zen. Those student talks began in November and December, and will be built into the monthly schedule going forward. These students are meeting with Daishin on a periodic basis to share ideas and best practices.

#### **Programs and Practice:**

In 2025, NZC maintained a robust range of Zen practice opportunities for and with the sangha. The presence of our resident priests-in-training served to enhance our offerings this year. The regular practice programs included:

- Four Introduction to Zazen classes
- Five weekend sesshins in addition to our 5-day Rohatsu sesshin
- One-day retreats, including one zazenkai and two Lazy Day retreats offered by Jikan
- Two Dharma Book Club series
- Six Fusatsu (Full Moon) ceremonies
- Three family program opportunities



### Daily Zazen Practice:

In addition to our regular daily schedule of morning zazen, our friends at Zen Fields offer early morning zazen via Zoom starting at 5:30 am. Also available via Zoom, Zen Fields offers evening zazen and discussion on both Monday and Thursday.

Our once-weekly evening zazen offering, Wednesday Just Sitting, continued through the year, with a hiatus after Jikan's departure; regular attendees then switched to Thursday evenings with Daishin and Zen Fields. We expect to resume the Wednesday evening Just Sitting this year, as long as a resident priest is present.

### Service Roles:

Many sangha members have taken up new service roles during the year, hopefully to continue progressing to learn and perform a greater range of those roles. We expect to provide some group training and polishing workshops in the coming year for doans and others.

### Precepts Training:

Under Daishin's guidance, several sangha members have been participating in precepts study and rakusu sewing. Some of them will complete the process with a jukai ceremony in March of this year.

In November, we were excited to be able to perform a jukai ceremony at the Omaha Corrections Center for six inmates, to celebrate their completion of precepts training over the last year. Rev. McCabe presided over this special event.



Work Practice:

We are continuing our regular Friday morning work practice, which is primarily garden work during the growing season, transitioning to other activities as the weather changes. In Spring, Summer and Fall, we held three Sangha Work Days, which were well attended and allowed completion of much necessary temple maintenance and upkeep. We also have members who provide ongoing volunteer services as their membership “dues.”



This year, we established the Second Sunday Work Practice period, a regular monthly work period prior to Sunday Open Zen. The response has been pleasing, and helps keep the temple clean and well-maintained. In addition, we have added a short 5-minute period of soji (mindful work) to the end of daily morning zazen. Of course, work practice is always scheduled into our sesshins.

We will continue to play around with ways to match talent with opportunity and to invite sangha members into this vital element of Zen practice.

Special celebrations and events:

We took several opportunities last year to celebrate, socialize, eat and be entertained.

We threw a farewell party for Shinkyu before his departure at the end of January.



We topped Buddha's Birthday celebration with a cake social.



In April, we were delighted by an energetic and inspiring performance from the Peaceful Forest taiko drum family.



In May, we engaged in somber reflection in our annual Remembrance Day service, led by resident priest-in-training Jikan



In June, the Tibetan monks of Gaden Sharste Monastery stayed at the Zen Center during their annual visit to Omaha. One of the monks shared a special evening dharma talk.



Of course, the big event of the year was our weekend anniversary celebration in July. And in the fall, we bid farewell to Jikan with a farewell potluck and party.

In December, we observed Rohatsu with a five-day sesshin.



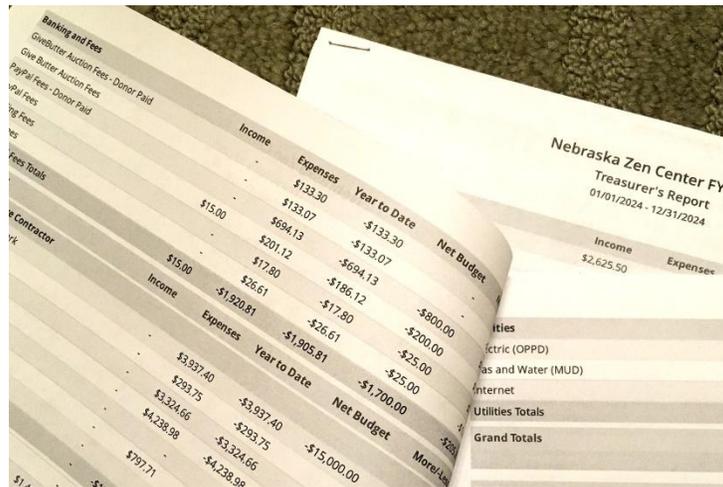
### **Membership and Attendance:**

Our members are the life-blood of NZC. Member numbers remained steady this year with a slight increase. We hope to plan some special events in the coming year to demonstrate our deep appreciation to our members.

We continue to have strong attendance for our regular Sunday Open Zen, with many new faces joining us in practice – often receiving brief introductory guidance when they come. Daily attendance has also been steady, and participation is healthy in retreats and other special events.

We continue to enjoy visits and participation from neighboring states and Zen communities, such as Lincoln Zen Center, Zen Fields in Ames, Iowa, Kansas Zen Center and others.

We continue our regular visitation with prisoner Buddhist groups at Tecumseh Prison, Omaha Corrections Center and other facilities.



## Financial:

We held one official fundraiser in 2025, as promised, in connection with our Fiftieth Anniversary celebration. In addition to seeking donations, we also held a raffle for two beautiful framed calligraphy pieces from our collection of Nonin Chowaney’s works.

We are deeply grateful for our memberships, which provide a fairly stable monthly income. However, we strain to meet our expenses with our income from all sources. In an effort to expand our funding sources, we again researched grant opportunities in 2025. After submitting an application to the Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, specifically tied to the support of our resident priest-in-training program, we were gratified to learn in December that we had been selected to receive a grant for the program from this foundation. Although the grant was modest, we are gratified to have our program recognized for support—particularly because the Foundation received twice the applications this year as last. Non-profits face especially challenging times right now for financial support. The grant comes with certain tracking and administrative expectations, which we will diligently comply with. For more information about the Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, see <https://fredericklenzfoundation.org>.

We will continue to explore new ideas for shoring up our financial picture and increasing support for our mission and purpose. Some planned steps toward that:

- Continue to explore grant opportunities.
- Finish digitizing our entire collection of Rev. Nonin Chowaney’s works for uploading to Fine Art America, where prints are now offered for sale. We have now linked FAA into our website to make these more readily available there.
- The calligraphy prints, NZC t-shirts and Nonin Chowaney’s book are all offered for sale through our website. We are working on a re-design and reorganization of the website to make purchase of these items more user-friendly.

- We may consider auctioning additional original calligraphy works in our collection, by Nonin and/or Ikkō and Tsugen Narasaki.
- We may base at least one fundraising effort in 2026 around building maintenance and improvement, as several major and minor projects are needed to keep our temple and grounds in top shape.

### **Communications:**

We continue to add new subscribers for our bi-weekly newsletter, now reaching over 800 subscribers. We have a healthy engagement rate for the email newsletters. We decided to discontinue our Facebook and Instagram postings and focus on upgrading and polishing our website with updated information about NZC and its activities. We maintain a YouTube account for our archived dharma talks, and we again aired a sponsorship ad on KIOS, our local NPR station for six months. We also placed an ad in the River City Mixed Chorus seasonal program.

Our communications work also includes fundraising messaging, materials like our brochures and business cards, and occasional sangha surveys, as well as content for grant proposals and similar efforts. We expect to circulate another sangha survey in the coming year, to keep abreast of sangha needs and preferences.

### **Building and Grounds:**

Mike Pray oversees building and grounds matters. Mike and sangha members Perry Jensen, Archie Sayre and others have been active in assisting with needed repairs and maintenance around the Zen Center. In 2025, a diseased crabapple tree was removed from the front yard, and other tree trimming work was performed. After radon testing, we implemented remedial measures to mitigate radon. Three formal sangha work days and weekly summer garden days in 2025 drew much appreciated participation.

Volunteer help and skills are always welcome. Along with routine temple cleaning, there is always ongoing lawn care, leaf raking, gutter cleaning and snow removal, garden work in the summer, and the usual variety of miscellaneous projects required to keep the Zen Center humming. We hope to promote and encourage these volunteer opportunities in the new year.

### **Outreach:**

NZC coordinated with representatives of Tri-Faith Initiative to present a 5B workshop for Sunday Open Zen.

Our regular visits from and with local high school and college religion classes continue to expand. In 2025, we hosted religion classes from University of Nebraska at Omaha, Central High School, Mercy High, Millard West and Millard North High, and four Creighton Prep classes.



*Pam, Sarah, Matt and Jenny with Judy Roitman and Stan Lombardo at the Kansas Zen Center*

Four of our members made a trek to Kansas City in the Spring, stopping off to visit our friends Judy Roitman and Stan Lombardo at the Kansas Zen Center in Lawrence, Kansas. Since then, several NZC members have participated in a variety of retreats at KZC, and a student from KZC came here to participate in our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary weekend.

We once again provided overnight space to six Tibetan monks from Gaden Shartse Monastery in south India, and enjoyed an evening session and dharma talk with them.

Representatives from Flatwater Collective and friends from Augustana Lutheran church attended Shinkyu's farewell party.



**Governance:**

The Board of Directors held four quarterly meetings in 2025, along with one special meeting and the Annual Meeting. Sangha members are always welcome to sit in on these meetings if interested. The meeting minutes are posted on our website, along with our Bylaws and policy documents.

In December, Board President Karalee Picard led the board in a special meeting to conduct a periodic review of NZC's vision and strategic plan. All the board members have completed a board training course.

Two directors stepped down at the end of their terms in February 2025, and two new members were added with a vote of the members in the annual meeting. Mike Pray will step off the board at the end of his term this year, and has nominated Jon Bakehouse to take his place on the Board and assume his responsibilities as head of the Building and Grounds committee. Mike has also headed our IT Committee, so the Board will need to seek sangha members who can step into that role. Former treasurer Vicki Grunwald has recently trained Joyce Guo Cheng Chao to take over treasury operations, and Joyce will be nominated for a board position in the upcoming annual meeting.

NZC has been operating without an Administrative Director since Terra Hall left the position last year. The board will continue to consider whether to hire someone for this position or determine other ways to accomplish the variety of tasks performed by this staff position in the past.

### **Plans for 2026**

- Continue to build, improve and publicize our unique priest residency program
- Explore ways to expand interest in our Spring and Fall fundraisers
- Complete a planned website overhaul, including a website store
- Apply for grants and explore other funding opportunities
- Hold a Jukai ceremony for precepts students
- Consider a sangha trip to Ryumonji for sesshin
- Continue our morning and evening zazen schedule
- Promote and encourage volunteer work practice
- Continue regular training for service roles
- Address several potential building projects: plaster repair in the zendo, possible replacement of upstairs windows, woodwork replacement on the exterior, etc.
- Plan a membership appreciation event
- Maintain and strengthen our outreach ties in the community

Thank you for all your continued practice and support throughout 2025!

In gassho,  
NZC 2025 Board